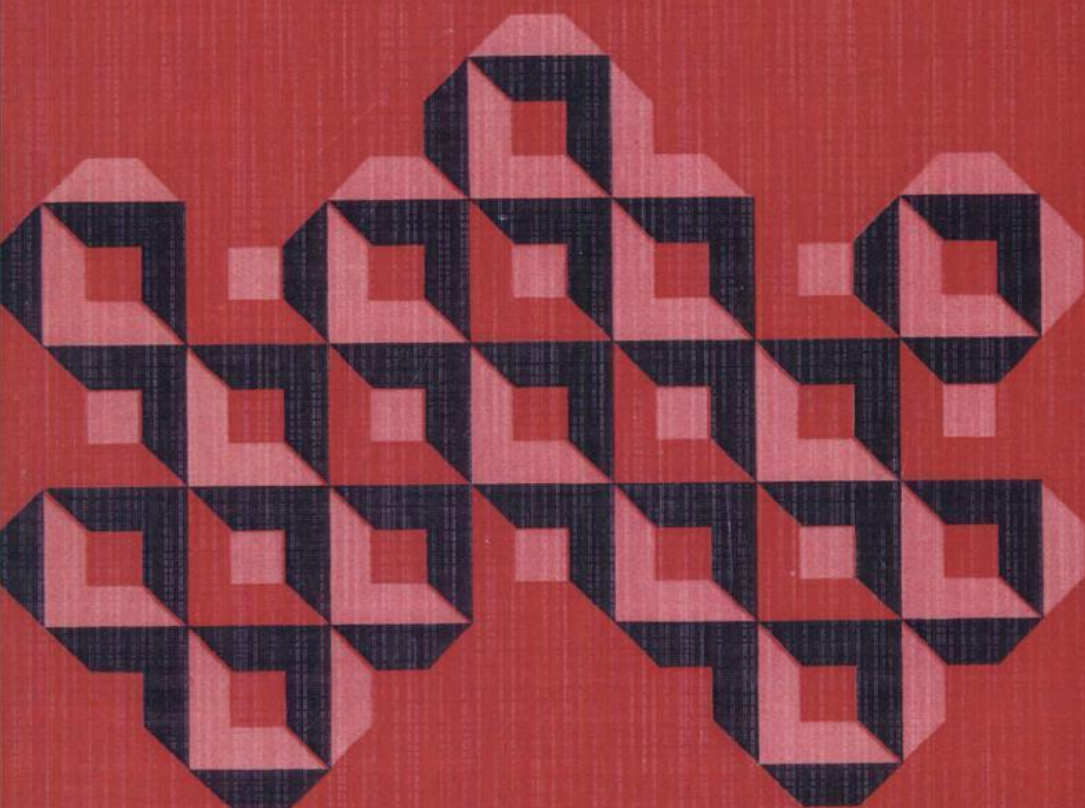


Tat-siong Benny Liew

Politics of Parousia

Reading Mark

Inter(con)textually



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VOLUME 42



POLITICS OF PAROUSIA

Reading Mark Inter(con)textually

BY

TAT-SIONG BENNY LIEW



BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON · KÖLN
1999

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Liew, Tat-Siong Benny.

Politics of Parousia : reading Mark inter(con)textually / by Tat-Siong Benny Liew.

p. cm. — (Biblical interpretation series, ISSN 0928-0731 ; v. 42)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 9004113606 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Bible. N.T. Mark—Social scientific criticism. 2. Politics in the Bible. 3. Second Advent—Biblical teaching. I. Title. II. Series.

BS2585.6.P6L54 1999

226.3'06—dc21

98-19920

CIP

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Liew, Tat-Siong Benny:

Politics of Parousia : reading Mark inter(con)textually / by Tat-Siong Benny Liew. - Leiden ; Boston ; Köln : Brill, 1999

(Biblical interpretation series ; Vol. 42)

ISBN 90-04-11360-6

ISSN 0928-0731

ISBN 90 04 11360 6

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is a revision of my Ph.D. dissertation (Vanderbilt University, 1997). I am grateful to the members of my dissertation committee—Jay Clayton, Peter Haas, Daniel Patte, Fernando Segovia, and Mary Ann Tolbert—for teaching me many invaluable lessons both inside and outside the classroom. I would like to express my appreciation in particular to the Co-Directors of my project: Daniel Patte and Mary Ann Tolbert. They have been supportive of my work from the first day I stepped on the campus of Vanderbilt University, and they have been patient and understanding when my writing of the dissertation was interrupted by a serious illness in the family. Without their able and untiring guidance, their faith in my potential as a scholar, and their personal interest in me as a human being, I rather doubt if this first-generation college graduate would ever accomplish what was previously nothing more than a dream.

I also need to thank Jay Clayton, who has gone way beyond the normal duties of a “minor” advisor. This dissertation is certainly better because of the courses, discussions, and a wide-range of bibliographical reference he blessed me with before my candidacy.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to two people who have been most important in my life. I want to thank Wai-hua Hung, my mother, and matriarch of her immediate family. Although she has never had the opportunity to finish grade school, she has wisdom and determination that I admire. She has always made education for her children the highest priority; because of that commitment, she has supported me financially (more than once) through my many years of formal education. I want to thank Pamela Kay Liew, my wife, who is also my intellectual partner and best friend. She has been an unending and unbending source of strength and support. In addition to reading, critiquing, and editing this entire manuscript, she has recently given birth to our first child. For all of that, I am most grateful.

PREFACE

When I was still a high school student in Hong Kong, I met a schoolmate who was three or four years my senior. I was very impressed by his charisma and his knowledge. Every time we got together, he would tell me about Chinese literature, Chinese history, and people like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping; he would tell me about politics.

My friend told me that his goal—and this was some twenty years before 1997—was to become the first Chinese chief executive officer of the Hong Kong government.

On one occasion, after he learned about my interest in the Bible and in theology, he told me I should give it up and pursue politics with him. “Politics,” he said, “that’s where the real battles are fought.”

Twenty years later, I realize that what my friend said was both true and false. I never gave up studying the Bible; and in doing that, I have also been involved in politics. Cultural politics may be a different kind of politics, but it is there also that real battles are being fought.

(My friend? He never did become the first Chinese chief executive officer of Hong Kong [Tung Chee-wah holds that position]. Although my friend did go into politics for a while, and won an elected office on the regional level, he has since left politics to enroll in the money-battle of the business world.)

This project is part of that “real battle”; it is also part of the development that has come to be known as literary criticism of the New Testament. Reading the Gospel of Mark with insights from contemporary literary theory, I intend to probe the relationship between Mark’s story of Jesus and colonial politics, and more specifically, the relationship between Mark’s emphasis on the parousia (or the return of Jesus) and his constructions of colonial subjects.

To begin, I will situate my project as one that involves Gospel studies in the socio-political struggles for liberation, and delineate reasons for such a direction (Chapter I). Then I will explain the methodology that underlies my study, and justify my coining of the term “inter(con)textuality” (Chapter II). Before I venture into Mark, I will also clarify why I see a connection between ancient Jewish apocalyptic and colonial politics (Chapter III).

My reading of Mark focuses on three main subjects (understood in terms of both subject-positions and subject-matters). The first has to do with authority (Chapter IV), the second agency (Chapter V), and the third gender (Chapter VI).

In the Conclusion (Chapter VII), I will employ Chinese American narratives to dialogue with the Markan text. Since my project has to do with cultural politics as well as literary criticism of the New Testament, I will reflect on what my conclusions have to say about the possibility of social change, as well as the socio-political interpretation of the Gospels.

CHAPTER ONE

REASONS AND DIRECTIONS

Within the last decade, a growing ensemble of New Testament scholars have voiced the need for literary studies of the Gospels to move beyond formalist analysis.¹ Both Stephen D. Moore (*Literary Criticism*), and Mary Ann Tolbert ("Response"), for example, decry the dominance of formalism as each attempts to map the developments of literary criticism within Gospel studies. For Moore, the formalist emphasis on textual coherence is obsolete and conservative; and he presents a version of deconstruction that highlights freplay or indeterminacy of meaning as a future alternative. Tolbert, on the other hand, sees formalist analysis as a helpful part, but not the entirety of literary criticism. While she also talks about Derridean deconstruction, Tolbert clearly envisions a future when literary criticism of the Gospels will be used in the realm of ideological or socio-political struggles to bring about liberation.²

My present project is situated on this latter path. I would like to

¹ Here literary studies of the Gospels refer to the conscientious application of literary theory to Gospel studies in North America since the late 1960s or early 1970s. Formalist analysis aims to demonstrate the internal form or structure of a text in all its complexity and ingenuity. This "purely aesthetic" goal is derived from two assumptions. First, a text is an autonomous literary artifact; "proper" literary criticism, then, should separate itself from all "external" concerns, be they biographical, ethical, social, historical, or political. Second, form and content are inextricably related, what a text means can only be known by observing how the text is put together. A classic presentation of literary formalism can be found in René Wellek and Austin Warren. A helpful discussion of the subject is also available in Lynn M. Poland.

² For Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 25–26), literary criticism of the Bible "permits" or "implies" a political agenda. To support that claim, she mentions three things: (1) the understanding that a biblical text is a construction like a novel implies that the text can be written differently; (2) the inevitability of multiple interpretations opens all interpretations, even those recognized by institutional authorities, to debates and contestation; and (3) the likelihood that biblical criticism may become more reader-friendly means the discipline may be democratized. One must remember, of course, that the political influences that literary criticism of the Bible may bring about are not necessarily of the oppositional kind that Tolbert assumes. As with everything else, there will be different and conflicting political agendas associated with literary criticism of the Bible. For instance, the ingenious coherence of a text, as formalist analysis emphasizes, can just as easily be seen by fundamentalists as an indication of "divine inspiration."

develop perspectives that continue to move Markan studies further into the socio-political arena.³ There are three main reasons why I have chosen to do so. They are: (1) my sense of postmodern sensibilities; (2) the problems associated with, and the recent political turn found within, Derridean deconstruction; and (3) my personal commitment to social change. Let me approach them one by one.

Postmodern Sensibilities

Citing the relationship between historical criticism and the discourse of modernity as an example, Walter Brueggemann (vii-ix, 1-6) argues that practices of biblical interpretation are inseparably linked to larger socio-cultural and intellectual trends of society. According to Brueggemann, the Enlightenment ideologies of objectivity, scientific positivism, and factuality provided the arsenal that historical critics employed to counteract church authoritarianism. The problem is, Brueggemann goes on to suggest, this age of modernity is coming to an end, and western societies have now moved into "postmodern" times. This changing landscape, in turn, makes it necessary for biblical interpreters to "negotiate" or "imagine" new perspectives and practices.⁴

Acknowledging that this emerging, postmodern landscape may be perceived and described in different ways,⁵ I see it as, first and fore-

³ Let me hasten to remark that the dominance of formalism within contemporary literary studies of the Gospels in no way signifies the *complete* absence of socio-political emphasis. See, for example, Ched Myers; and Herman C. Waetjen, *Reordering of Power*. As Vincent Leitch (xii) points out, even in the heyday of formalism within the broader circle of literary studies, other voices and practices still persisted, although often in diminished scope.

⁴ While I generally agree with Brueggemann's observations, I think his understanding of the relationship between biblical interpretations and the larger socio-cultural and intellectual trends is too one-dimensional or uni-directional. One should realize that biblical interpretations are not merely passive reflections of societal and intellectual trends, what we do as biblical interpreters can also bring about change within those realms.

⁵ The continual contest to hegemonize discourse by arguing for different definitions of important terms is, of course, the point of Raymond Williams' *Keywords*. As Kwame Anthony Appiah puts it, "the semantic island of the postmodern" is surrounded by "shark-infested waters," and it can be difficult to find one's bearings ("Post- in Postmodernism," 341). Jay Clayton ("Dickens," 184) points out that fluidity of definitions is itself a major characteristic of the postmodern. In addition to diverse accounts of the postmodern, there are also various accounts *for* the postmodern; see, for example, Langdon Gilkey, 3-14; and Cornel West, "New Cultural Politics," 20-26.

most, a terrain of resistance. Assuming the role of an adversary, the postmodern refuses to foreclose the assumptions and principles of the modern age as flawless and complete.⁶ Whether critics characterize modernity in terms of scientific positivism (for example, Brueggemann, viii), Weberian rationalization (for example, Appiah, "Post- in Postmodernism," 341-343), or human progress (for example, Huyssen, 193, 196, 217-218),⁷ what they reject is the modern notion or ideal of universal truths or standards that are applicable in all times, at all places, and for all people. Within postmodern thought, "realities" are not something out there that we merely discover and describe. Instead, we construct our "realities" by making sense of our world from a certain standpoint; and where we stand will always shape the meaning of what we perceive. Postmodern thinking argues, then, that knowledge and understanding are perceptual, and thus "perspectival." In lieu of the Cartesian split of the perceiving subject and the perceived object into two separate entities,⁸ postmoderns say they exist as "relations between two coordinates . . . each serving to differentiate the other" (Sergi Karcevskij, 50).⁹

In the absence of omniscience and absolute objectivity, emphases are put on contexts, locations, specific particularities, and perspectives. Rather than having eternal, objective, and verifiable truths that are given by nature, truths become contingent, constructed, and

⁶ As A. K. M. Adam (1) suggests, the term "post-"modern naturally signifies an inevitable relationship with the modern. But I agree with Andreas Huyssen (182, 190) that the relationship between the modern and the postmodern cannot be simplified into a dichotomy of either continuity or discontinuity.

⁷ I must clarify that while Appiah has problems with modern sensibilities, he also has reservations about the postmodern. For Appiah, like Frederic Jameson (*Postmodernism*), the postmodern represents an all-encompassing capitalist, consumerist culture that in many ways accompanies the colonial project ("Post- in Postmodernism," 344-357).

⁸ For a brief but helpful discussion concerning the rise of modern sciences, the dualistic understandings of Descartes, and how they result in an individualism that sees each individual as a self-contained mind, see Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., 32-35. Max Horkheimer has also argued that the split between subject and object is produced by the human ambition to subjugate nature. For Rey Chow, this split is the "epistemological foundation" (60) that supports all kinds of social subjugation, not the least of which is the subjugation of women.

⁹ Although this quote from Karcevskij is from an earlier generation and is written in reference to language, it is nevertheless applicable to the postmodern understanding of reality. Another harbinger of postmodern sensibilities, Mikhail Bakhtin, also has insightful things to say about this subject with what he calls "the law of placement" and "surplus of seeing"; see Michael Holquist, *Dialogism*, 21-37, 89. For an excellent example of a critic actually at work deconstructing this dichotomy between subject and object, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies."

pluralistic.¹⁰ This problematization of general and universal truth claims is what Jean-François Lyotard means when he writes, "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward meta-narratives" (xxix).

This kind of skepticism, in the words of Paul Bové, "celebrates . . . the increasing impossibility of defending 'truth' in any metaphysical way and welcomes the political possibilities for self-determination inherent in a recognition that 'truth' is made by humans as the result of very specific material practices" ("Discourse," 55). Different questions spring up as soon as metanarratives are de-legitimized as constructions, not reflections, of realities. Instead of "what is true?", the more pressing questions of the postmodern become "who has the power to make a truth claim?", "how does a truth claim affect relations and practices?", and "why can't one reconstruct a different reality?" As suggested by Frantz Fanon (*Black Skin*, 17), merely "knowing" or "understanding" the world is not enough; what matters is to change it (in the direction of freedom, justice, and peace). In other words, postmodern discourse is no longer centered on aesthetics or philosophy, but on oppositional and liberational politics.¹¹

Linking their academic work with oppositional political movements, postmoderns seek to "re-politicize" criticism by foregrounding political and ethical questions in their work.¹² Focusing often on what a

¹⁰ While this understanding of truth brings about possibilities of liberation, it also seems to leave the question regarding the value of liberation open-ended. In other words, if truths are constructed, changeable, and pluralistic, why should people agree that liberation is right, good, beneficial, or fitting? Because of that, some may see the postmodern as an inevitable invitation to an "anything-goes" relativism; but I, like many other postmodern critics, still believe in the possibility of, and the need to, work out some middle ground between absolutism and relativism without falling into a pluralism that is actually repressive tolerance. Frank Lentricchia (15–18), for example, proposes "society" and "intersubjectivity" as that balancing force or middle ground. Similarly, William Dean (103–105) argues that social traditions or conventions that are "less-than-absolute," but "more-than-individualist," should enable "rights talks" to continue without universal structures. I think an example of that is provided by Tolbert ("Afterwords: Politics and Poetics," 309–310) when she suggests that at least for people within the United States, the lip service that the constitution alleges to democracy and equality has given them sufficient grounds to argue for liberation. For a relevant discussion on such ethical assumptions, see Jennifer Daryl Slack and Laurie Anne Whitt.

¹¹ Linda Hutcheon ("Response," 18–19) also sees this shift of emphasis as corresponding to Richard Rorty's two approaches to truth; that is, a vertical model that emphasizes the relationship between representation and reality is shifting to a horizontal one that focuses on representations as past and present re-presentations.

¹² Admittedly, Stanley Fish's eloquent summarizing statement does have a point regarding the inconsistency of some postmodern critics (specifically, Fish has in mind

text assumes rather than what it takes pain to state,¹³ or seeking to recover what has been left out or made silent,¹⁴ postmodern criticism probes the dominant ideology and power relations that constitute knowledge and structure life. The ultimate goal, once again, is to resist the status quo, and bring about change and transformation.

As a terrain of resistance, postmodern understanding also features a protest against the rigid divisions and compartmentalizations that the university imposes. For postmodern critics, such disciplinary lines are part of the tools that the dominant society uses to categorize, fragmentize, hierarchize, and oppress its subjects. One should understand, as a result, that the main significance of crossing disciplines does not lie in the promotion of interdisciplinary dialogue or creation of a more unified knowledge, but the dismantling of classification, specialization, and professionalism.¹⁵ Following the same train of

Donald Pease ["New Americanists"], who claim for themselves a more public or political role when they also declare that political and material implications lie beneath the surface of all disciplinary practices. Fish writes, "In short, the clash will always be between two kinds of political criticism, one (falsely) claiming that it is not political, the other (falsely) claiming that only it is political" (130; see also 56-57). I think the same point is even better clarified by Trinh T. Minh-ha when she underscores the importance of understanding film politically rather than differentiating between "political" and "non-political" films. To Trinh, the "political/non-political" opposition itself betrays "a dualistic view of art and politics, art and science, art and life" (*Framer*, 183-184; see also Trinh, *Moon*, 147-148). Lentricchia (10-11, 102) makes the same point when he rejects Karl Marx's differentiation between philosophers who "interpret" the world, and people who "change" it. For Lentricchia, both groups are affecting the world with what they do, the difference has to do with the kind of effect that is involved, whether it is conservative or radical. I insist, then (in contrast to Fish), that a difference be made between the oppositional politics of most postmoderns and the affirmative politics of the so-called "apolitical" critics (see also Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Literature"; and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 210). My use of the verb "re-politicize" may also be justified in light of the view that literary criticism was once closely related to socio-political critique in the eighteenth century C.E. (see Patrick Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints*, 25, 68-70).

¹³ According to Peter J. Rabinowitz (70), such a reading strategy brings about the most valuable "political" criticism.

¹⁴ This is what Clayton understands to be the "defamiliarizing" work of "genealogy," which he also sees as "a postmodern intellectual procedure" ("Dickens," 181-182).

¹⁵ According to Bruce Robbins (15-17), this breakdown of disciplinary lines represents a "lateral movement" (rather than the customary "downward movement") that enables professional critics to reach the public. Michel Foucault (*Discipline*, 170-194) has convincingly argued for the connection between disciplines and exclusion. More than once, Foucault has also complained about the way society defines intellectuals on the basis of professional expertise (see *Power/Knowledge*, 126; and John K. Simon). Citing Steven Connor's term "operationalization," Alan Sinfield (*Faultlines*, 286-287) sees "professionalization" as an embarrassment for scholars of the

thought, postmoderns staunchly oppose two other modern dogmas: (1) the separation between high and low culture;¹⁶ and (2) the segregation between the academic and the public world. Refusing to be quarantined within the tradition of modern "objective" and disciplined scholarship, many postmodern critics—particularly women and minorities¹⁷—overtly "re-politicize" academic studies, "trespass" cultures and territories, and introduce various "non-canonical" texts and subjects into the curricula.¹⁸

In accordance with postmodern sensibilities, discourse on truths and cultural practices is inseparable from power relations, and thus a matter of politics. However one may feel or think about the postmodern, he or she must, going back to Brueggemann, "acknowledge [it] as the inescapable context in which we live and interpret" (viii–ix).¹⁹ This understanding of the postmodern partly explains my desire to

humanities, because it signifies their participation in corporate capitalism when they are supposed to transcend the dominance of business.

¹⁶ For an excellent account of this separation, see Harriett Hawkins. For postmoderns, the modern disdain for popular culture is not merely an aesthetic matter, but one involving economic, social, and political factors. See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture*; Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*; and Pierre Bourdieu. John Fiske (154–155), trying to link the protests against cultural stratification and academic segregation as opposite sides of the same coin, cites Bakhtin and Bourdieu to argue that low culture or popular art is significant to postmodern critics because, unlike high culture or high art, it is not "distanced" from everyday life and the materiality of existence. However, I am afraid Fiske is guilty of the inconsistency that Fish points out regarding many postmodern critics. The difference between high and low culture does not lie in the "distance" that each has from the material existence of everyday, but in the kind of material existence to which each is related. This postmodern merge between "high" and "low" culture is often presented in terms of a shift from a traditional, humanistic understanding of culture as something narrowly intellectual and aesthetic to an anthropological understanding of culture as everything representative of a group's way of life; see, for example, R. Williams, *Keywords*, 76–82.

¹⁷ In Huyssen's (219–220) opinion, the women's movement and the postcolonial awareness, along with the ecological movement, have been—and will continue to be—major factors within the constitution of postmodern sensibilities. I will have more to say about the postcolonial turn with the postmodern in the next section of this chapter.

¹⁸ According to Clayton, this "blurring of spheres," with its orientation to revolutionary politics, has been the most influential intellectual development since the mid-70s, and is "the hallmark of postmodernism" (*Pleasures*, 10). The corresponding academic phenomenon is generally known as "cultural studies," which Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg ("Cultural Studies," 1–2, 4–6) see as not simply interdisciplinary, but transdisciplinary, anti-disciplinary, and counter-hegemonic. A fine introduction to cultural studies can be found in Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints*.

¹⁹ Appiah ("Post- in Postmodernism," 343) claims that the postmodern is a global condition, but hastens to add that he does not mean everyone on this globe lives

engage literary criticism of the Gospels with socio-political struggle for liberation.

Problematizing and Politicizing Deconstruction

Using the technique known as "double reading," deconstruction aims to demonstrate "the unreality of language" (Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, 160); that is, how meanings of supposedly coherent texts cannot help but "disseminate" in self-contradictions and disintegrate because of the nature of language.²⁰ For example, this is the conclusion Moore comes to in his study of Mark (*Mark and Luke*, xi-84). Mark's self-defeating ending, the obscurity of the naked young man in Mark 14, the fluidity of boundaries that results from Jesus' parables, Mark's free adaptations of Hebrew scriptures, and the "presence/absence" of "God/Jesus" are, for Moore, all indications of Mark's textual unconscious. This deconstruction of meaning or "proper ends" is, of course, part of the poststructuralist project to displace the entire system of western metaphysics by pulling out all the foundations or "proper beginnings" from which truth claims are launched (for example, Jacques Derrida, "Structure"; and Derrida, "Différance"). However, in spite of Derrida's overall philosophical orientation, his problematization of language and his claim that "there is nothing outside the

with postmodern sensibilities. Needless to say, to conservatives who uphold the status quo, the postmodern is nothing but a dangerous relativism or anarchic nihilism (see, for example, Daniel Bell; and William Bennett). Even among the more progressive and liberal camp, the postmodern is also not necessarily received with open arms. Both Jameson (*Postmodernism*) and Eagleton ("Capitalism"), for example, are suspicious of its connection with capitalism, as well as its potential contribution to oppositional politics. Unable to move beyond his own training as a New Critic and unwilling to accept the unassurable influence that critics may or may not have on public policies, Fish also openly questions if postmodern sensibilities really make sense for literary academicians. But perhaps the most well known debate is the one involving Jürgen Habermas ("Modernity"), who identifies postmodern sensibilities as "neoconservative." An excellent evaluation of the debate is given by Huyssen (199-206), who thinks Habermas means to target French poststructuralism rather than the postmodern in his criticism.

²⁰ According to Clayton (*Pleasures*, 43-44), "double reading" has three distinctive features: (1) this self-contradiction of meaning is inevitable despite an author's competence; (2) double reading deconstructs a text at the very place on which its order and meaning depends; and (3) this self-contradiction cannot be resolved to bring about a textual coherence. As Catherine Belsey writes, "In this context the notion of a text which tells of (or the) truth, as perceived by an individual subject (the author), whose insights are the source of the text's single and authoritative meaning, is not only untenable but literally unthinkable" (*Critical Practice*, 3).

text" (*Of Grammatology*, 158) often lock deconstruction within the "logocentrism" that it seeks to deconstruct. Denying any significance to the relationship between literary texts and all "extrinsic" factors like socio-political relations and historical specificities, deconstructionists gratify themselves with the "bliss" of aesthetic experimentation and free-play to demonstrate a text's indeterminate meaning, or "aporia." This new "form" of formalism is, as it turns out, elitist, modernist, and impractical. It is elitist because its practitioners assume a superior stance to the "unenlightened" who toil fruitlessly to make sense of a text or the world, while they themselves take pride and joy in the density and difficulty of their own work. It is modernist because it maintains the autonomy of literary texts, privileges aesthetics, and thus subscribes to the modernist separation of "high" and "low" culture.²¹ Finally, it is impractical because, as Eric Rothstein (124–127) points out using Herbert Simon's notion of "satisficing," the emphasis on indeterminacy is itself a determinate choice, and people rarely choose indeterminacy as they face life's various tasks. As Adrienne Rich comments on the function of theory, it "can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth" ("Notes," 213–214).

Perhaps the most devastating criticism of deconstruction's playful "bliss" is that it cripples any useful reflection or purposeful articulation. Attacking western metaphysics by grounding everything on the problematic of language, Derrida's theory indirectly voids everything of intention and influence. In light of—or more appropriately, under the cloud of—"dissemination" and "différance," human communications become impenetrable, human actions pointless, and human beings powerless. What this fatalistic outlook on language and life really sets off in deconstruction's own relay of the signifying chain is nihilism, solipsism, and conformism. Happy to retreat to the private cultivation of their own philosophical and linguistic garden,

²¹ This is part of the reason why Huyssen (191, 206–216) argues that (1) European poststructuralism, of which deconstruction is a vital part, is more modernist than postmodernist; (2) much of the criticism directed against postmodernism, like those by Habermas, is because of an inaccurate impression that postmodernism and poststructuralism are one and the same thing; and (3) postmodernism is predominantly an American phenomenon. While poststructuralism does break down many modernist assumptions, it in itself fails to break out of modernist aesthetics. In that sense, what I am about to describe regarding the shift within deconstruction can also be understood as its "postmodernization."

deconstructionists in effect concede to the dominance of existing powers. Such a move is not only politically damaging, but ethically irresponsible.²² For Foucault, this process is “a silent, cautious deposition of the world upon the whiteness of a piece of paper, where it can possess neither sound nor interlocutor, where it has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being” (*Order of Things*, 300).

Because of these limitations, deconstruction's life-span becomes inevitably short.²³ This does not mean deconstructionists no longer exist, but as Clayton (*Pleasures*, 50–59) points out, pure deconstructive works that emphasize freeplay and indeterminacy are hardly published any more in the United States, and a second generation of deconstructionists has, instead, applied the technique of “double reading” to specific political struggles for liberation.

²² Mary Louise Pratt writes, “Knowledge is interested, and interest implies conflict; to advance an interpretation is to insert it into a network of power relations” (228). Deconstruction is implicated, then, by its unwillingness to advance any coherent interpretation. As Nancy Fraser argues, indeterminacy shields deconstruction from understanding, and participating in, “difference as dispute, as good, old-fashioned, political fight” (“French Derrideans,” 142; see also Edward Said, *World*, 183–216). While deconstruction's “nothing-works” cynicism may be understandable in light of Derrida's own social location as an Algerian-born, Jewish leftist and what happened in France in May, 1968, it does not make it any less politically damaging. To borrow Huyssen's words, “enlightened cynicism is as insufficient an answer as blue-eyed enthusiasm for peace and nature” (219). It becomes even more insufficient when its cynicism turns into consumer capitalism with its marketing of avant-garde shock value, and its “forget-the-world-but-please-yourself” mentality of blissful freeplay. Of course, the politics of deconstruction can be a highly controversial issue. Even Brantlinger (*Crusoe's Footprints*, 25–26), in his critique of deconstruction, is careful to point out that Derrida's problematization of language and textuality, in light of his larger philosophical orientation, may have contributed to the interrogation of culture and representation, and thus help bring about the rise of cultural studies. The problem is, *pure* deconstruction never couples its problematization of language with an ideological or socio-political interrogation of representation. Clayton (*Pleasures*, 34–50) also refers to deconstruction's charge against narrative as a political endeavor. While deconstruction's view that narrative's linearity fosters authoritarianism may have helped challenge the traditional canon, Clayton himself is quick to critique deconstruction's “blanket” condemnation of all narratives as teleological and as an omission of history, of practice, and of difference. Like deconstruction, European poststructuralism's political or revolutionary element is generally diffused and overshadowed by its obsession with playful experimentation, its “epistemology of failure,” and the corresponding “paralysis of praxis” (Lentricchia, 40, 42–43). For example, while Clayton (*Pleasures*, 100–102) is positive about Lyotard's emphasis on local narrative communities, he has to issue a warning against the “anarchist” and “irrationalist” components of Lyotard's work.

²³ This sentiment is echoed by (1) Huyssen who sees poststructuralism, and thus deconstruction, as a “swansong of modernism” (188, 209, 216); and (2) Fraser, who

Two of the best representatives of this shift within deconstruction may be Barbara Johnson and Spivak. B. Johnson's roots in deconstruction are well known. She was a student of Paul de Man, thus an active member of the Yale School of deconstruction, and the translator of Derrida's *Dissemination*. In 1987, however, B. Johnson characterizes her collection of essays, *A World of Difference*, as an attempt to transfer her work "out of the realm of linguistic universality or deconstructive allegory and into contexts in which difference is very much at issue in the 'real world'" (2). In an interview published in the same year, B. Johnson confesses that "I've gone as far as I want to go with opening up ambiguities. I need to attach that kind of consideration to questions whose answer cannot simply be, 'It's undecidable'" ("Interview," 170). If there is any doubt as to what questions she has in mind, a clarification can be found in her next collection of essays, *The Wake of Deconstruction*, when B. Johnson (29–36), for example, criticizes de Man's "close reading" for absolutizing a text's authority to the point of excluding questions of gender and racial harassment.²⁴

B. Johnson, however, never renounces her ties with deconstruction. Her title, *The Wake of Deconstruction*, summarizes her project to give deconstruction life "in the act of taking that life away" (17), or to wake up deconstruction during its own wake. B. Johnson (46–49) does so by insisting on deconstruction's political potential, saying that it, like the political critique of sexism and racism as systemic or institutional evil, argues for meanings that are beyond authorial intention or human control, and for effects that become sites of endless struggles. At the same time, she admits that deconstruction, as "a response to propositional thinking, or positivistic thinking" (102), should play a supporting role to a larger political project like feminism or anti-racism rather than assuming a dominant, independent position. Citing Mark Tushnet, B. Johnson (36–37) even presents the work of

sees the "indefinite suspension of activities" on the part of the Derridean Center for Philosophical Research in 1984 as a fulfillment of her prediction that the Derridean attempt to "withdraw" from, or so-called "deconstruct," politics could only be a "temporary waystation" rather than a "permanent resting place" ("French Derrideans," 142–143, 152–154).

²⁴ Feminists have launched some of the earliest and strongest critiques regarding how deconstruction undermines their political agency by dissolving female subjects; see, for example, Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck.

Critical Legal Studies as an example of how deconstruction and political critique can be brought together.²⁵

Like B. Johnson, Spivak translated Derrida's work (*Of Grammatology*), and helped make deconstruction accessible to English readers. In an article written in 1980 ("Unmaking and Making"), Spivak begins to differentiate deconstruction as a philosophical-theoretical adventure that undermines a text, and as a practical enterprise that "articulates" on behalf of a larger polemic. Her preference for the latter is clearly stated in the introduction of the article; and by the end, her feminist polemic is asserted. Her "anguish" over deconstruction's emphasis on an indeterminacy that effectually leaves sexist texts intact leads her to write another article in 1980 entitled, "Finding Feminist Readings: Dante-Yeats."

Participating in the Political Seminar at C  r  sy, France in the same year, Spivak ("Limits and Openings"), argues that as critics destabilize the exclusion of women, they also need to deconstruct deconstruction's own exclusion of political-economy by a critical application of Marxist theories. Following another article written in 1985 ("Reading the World"), in which she pushes for the deconstruction of various forms of formalism for the purpose of involvement and change, she begins to weave her feminist and Marxist polemics with a postcolonial flair against both implicit and explicit imperialism (for example, "Three Women's Texts"; and "Imperialism and Sexual Difference"). She characterizes her work in the beginning of her latest collection of essays, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, as "thinking through the shift from (anti-)essentialism to agency" (ix) by "forcing . . . deconstruction(s) into 'an impure, contaminating, negotiated, bastard and violent . . . filiation . . .'" (x). Even a brief look at the index is sufficient to see her continual commitment to move deconstruction into oppositional political practices. There are, for example, "More on Power/ Knowledge," "The Politics of Translation," and "Feminism and Deconstruction, Again: Negotiations."

Perhaps the greatest contribution Spivak makes to shift deconstruction beyond "diff  rance" and "aporia" into oppositional politics, or what she calls "persistent critique" or "affirmative deconstruction," starts with her idea of "strategic essentialism" (sometimes also

²⁵ According to Tushnet, Critical Legal Studies argue that (1) law is in some sense indeterminate; (2) the contexts in which laws are passed must be understood; and (3) law is a political business.

called “a practical politics of the open end”). According to Spivak, deconstruction helps us understand how discourse, constructions of truths, and the production of anything positive, inevitably require the problematic of establishing a foundation or premise. Dwelling single-mindedly on such problematizations, however, cannot provide us with a political theory, because doing so will only lead to a “wishy-washy” relativism, or an irresponsible hedonism. Either way, one ends up sabotaging deconstruction’s potential guardianship against fundamentalism and totalitarianism. Instead, one must learn to use deconstruction without being paralyzed by deconstruction. This is done, Spivak contends, by “negotiation” and “catachresis”; that is, by adopting a foundation or a premise from time to time, but all the while remembering such an adoption cannot be absolute or beyond questioning. To use one of Spivak’s own examples, it is the tension, or the balance, between the knowledge of mortality and the daily “maintenance” of one’s body, like brushing our teeth or taking a bath. One must do what one can do for scrupulous ends. The question of agency should take precedence over that of essentialism or anti-essentialism.

While Spivak (*Post-Colonial Critic*, 46–47, 53, 101–102, 111, 136) acknowledges that deconstruction has the potential for both elitism and radicalism, she repeatedly argues that the shift from the former to the latter is a reflection of Derrida’s own development,²⁶ and that deconstruction, feminism, and Marxism can bring each other into creative tension. While the question concerning Derrida’s personal politics may be debatable, there is no question about Spivak’s commitment to “revise” deconstruction into an oppositional politics of reading, and an interrogative strategy to ensure political vigilance (Angela McRobbie, “Strategies”).²⁷

²⁶ For Spivak, the watershed that turned Derrida from “questioning” to “engagement” happened in 1974, when the sign “woman” drew him into questions of sexual difference (Derrida, “Women in the Beehive”). Spivak (*Post-Colonial Critic*, 107–108) argues that the same shift can be found in de Man.

²⁷ Embracing a deconstruction that no longer produces playful and philosophical readings, Spivak labels herself a “revisionist,” as opposed to a “purist deconstructivist” (*Post-Colonial Critic*, 11–13, 155). Not everybody associated with Derridean deconstruction is sympathetic to what Spivak is doing. Derrida himself has remained ambiguous toward Spivak’s “revisionist” project, while the “purists” in Europe are still of the opinion that Derrida has more to do with deconstructing politics than politicizing deconstruction (see Fraser, “French Derrideans,” 133–143). As Russell Berman writes, “Spivak’s position is one that the deconstructive establishment has attempted to marginalize” (16).

I have lingered over the issue of deconstruction not only because it is specifically mentioned by both Tolbert and Moore in their separate “mapping” of literary studies of the Gospels, but also because deconstruction in particular, and poststructuralism in general, is threatening to dominate the discourse regarding the use of literary theory in New Testament criticism, as well as the discourse regarding the understanding of postmodern biblical criticism. When John Dominic Crossan tried to introduce Derrida to biblical scholarship in the late 70s with *Raid on the Articulate* and *Cliffs of Fall*, he found a rather unreceptive audience. With the academic capital of literary theory rising rapidly in value within biblical studies since the mid-80s, however, Derridean deconstruction has come into a wider circulation. Edgar McKnight, for example, spends the first half of his *Postmodern Use of the Bible* talking about textual indeterminacy. Likewise, Adam (5–16), citing C. West, uses three terms to characterize the postmodern: “antifoundational” (the problematization of starting points that launch truth claims), “antitotalizing” (the suspicion of all-encompassing theories), and “demystifying” (the uncovering of ideological or political elements within supposedly “apolitical” discourse). The corresponding “lessons” Adam draws for postmodern biblical criticism are: (1) deconstructive reading that problematizes; (2) transgressive reading that emphasizes interdisciplinary work and freeplay; and (3) political criticism, which occupies a relatively minor portion of Adam’s attention. Finally, the similarities—both in terms of contributors and contents—between The Bible and Culture Collective’s *The Postmodern Bible* and the two *Semeia* issues on poststructuralism (David Jobling and Moore; and Gary A. Phillips, *Poststructural Criticism*) are so striking that one wonders if postmodern and poststructural biblical criticism are one and the same thing. I am not interested in a “wholesale write-off” of deconstruction or poststructuralism, what I think is necessary, though, is to move beyond its nihilistic and eccentric tendency. For instance, what does it mean when Moore suggests that biblical scholars should imitate what he calls Mark’s “cryptic postcard style” (*Mark and Luke*, 61–84)? And even more significantly, what will such imitation exactly accomplish?²⁸

²⁸ This pragmatic concern is also the point David Lodge is trying to make in *Small World*. In a scene close to the end of his story, a British humanist, a French structuralist, a German reception-theorist, an Italian Marxist, and an American post-structuralist form a panel for a MLA session. Their presentations seem so diverse and incommensurate that the session is about to end in a deadlock, until a character

There is yet another reason why I have lingered over deconstruction. I think it provides a good transition to talk about a post-colonial turn within the postmodern through another theorist who also politicizes deconstruction. The theorist I have in mind is Homi Bhabha.²⁹ In "Interrogating Identity," for example, Bhabha seeks to pursue a political moment that Derrida acknowledges but fails to specify; namely, "the emergence of the problematic of cultural difference within ethnology" (59). Likewise, Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonders" talks about a necessary "departure from Derrida" to pose the question of authority and power to "différance" (108–109). Another of Bhabha's essays, "DissemiNation," starts with what is at once a compliment and supplement to Derrida; Bhabha writes, "The title of this chapter—DissemiNation—owes something to the wit and wisdom of Jacques Derrida, but *something more* to my own experience of migration" (139; emphasis mine). As Bhabha uses Derridean deconstruction to argue for the "ambivalence" or "hybridity," and thus the relative frailty of colonial discourse,³⁰ his work is equally significant in his attempt to relate the postmodern and the postcolonial; or, in his words, "to rename the postmodern from the position of the post-colonial" ("The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," 175).³¹

by the name of Persse McGarrigle breaks the silence with the "strange" question: "What do you *do* if everybody agrees with you?" (319).

²⁹ My discussion on Bhabha is greatly facilitated by Bart Moore-Gilbert (especially 114–151). Moore-Gilbert's work does not only help make sense of some of Bhabha's often difficult-to-understand prose, it also provides an insightful comparison among the so-called "Holy Trinity" (Robert Young, *Colonial Desire*, 163) of post-colonial theorists: Said, Spivak, and Bhabha.

³⁰ It is important to point out that Bhabha is extremely eclectic in his methodology, even more so than, say, Spivak. While Spivak's history with Derrida causes her to argue at times that Derrida provides the greatest potential for socio-political criticism *vis-à-vis* other theorists (for example, Foucault and Gilles Deleuze in "Can the Subaltern Speak"), Bhabha appeals to Louis Althusser, Bakhtin, Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Derrida in an equally positive manner (for example, "Commitment").

³¹ As I noted previously regarding Appiah, many postcolonial and/or minority critics have distanced themselves from the postmodern with suspicions. Said, for example, has not really commented on the postmodern since he expresses reservations with so-called "high" theory in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Bhabha's discussion of the postmodern and the postcolonial is, in my opinion, best presented in four of his essays, which together make up the last part of *The Location of Culture*. These essays are: (1) "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency"; (2) "By Bread Alone: Signs of Violence in the Mid-Nineteenth Century"; (3) "How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation"; and (4) "Conclusion: 'Race,' Time and the Revision of Modernity." Since Bhabha's presentation in these essays is very dense and somewhat repetitive, I will, for the sake of clarity, summarize and combine the thoughts and ideas gleaned from his four essays.

Characterizing the dominant discourse on the postmodern as an "ethics of self-destruction" that celebrates the freedom of "multiple selves" ("Conclusion," 238, 240), Bhabha asserts that the postmodern has yet to face up to the fact that this "freedom" of "self-destruction" is built upon the literal destruction of others, and the "unfreedom" of many colonized people ("The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," 173-175). Bhabha registers two major complaints in relationship to this "denial" or "ignorance." First, Bhabha finds the discourse on the postmodern to be overly concerned with epistemology, or, in his words, too "cognitivist" ("Conclusion," 239). This understanding of modernity as "theoretical determinant" (Chow, 56) or as rationality becomes, for Bhabha, "the 'rationalizations' of modernity" ("The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," 171, 177). Instead of starting with the "failure of logocentrism," Bhabha suggests "the subaltern history of the margins of modernity" as another starting point ("The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," 175).

Bhabha's second problem with the postmodern is related to his first. He complains that certain postmodern theorists, like Jameson and Foucault ("The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," 192-197; "How Newness Enters," 214-221; and "Conclusion," 243-245, 248-249), have focused their attention solely on the "synchronous and spatial" ("Conclusion," 240). Without necessarily denying the significance of the way the postmodern addresses the question of cultural diversity and problematizes claims to truth and objectivity, Bhabha affirms the need to talk about a "genealogy of modernity" as well as a "genealogy of postmodernity" ("Conclusion," 242, 251). With what he calls a "time-lag," Bhabha argues that rather than "con-temporizing" cultural difference, one must first "temporalize," and talk about the displacement and colonization of people since the early days of modernity.

Bhabha's "time-lag" points out, for example through the work of Fanon, that black people are not included—in other words, they lag behind—in the modern constitution of what it means to be a human being ("Conclusion," 236-238).³² A similar "time-lag," however, also haunts the colonizers (for example, the realization that so-called

³² Bhabha seems to have chosen the term "time-lag" because it brings rich and important nuances. While it implies temporality, "time-lag" simultaneously implies a silence of history, and thus the need for a genealogy ("By Bread Alone," 198; and "Conclusion," 250-251). In addition, the term carries another more obscure yet important sense; Bhabha writes, "in the early days of settler colonization, to be lagged was to be transported to the colonies for penal servitude" ("Conclusion," 247).

"Englishness" is also a belated construction that happened *after* colonial encounters), and thus creates a space for the colonized to "enunciate" ("Conclusion," 250–251; see also "Signs"). This "enunciation" does not only mean the agency to destabilize colonial authority, it also signifies the possibility of an open future ("The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," 176–192; "By Bread Alone," 199–211; and "Conclusion," 254–255). For Bhabha, then, the postmodern celebration of "multiple selves" should involve an acknowledgment of both a (neo)colonial past and present as well as postcolonial resistance. Speaking at a conference on cultural studies (which, as I mentioned, is closely related to the postmodern), Bhabha summarizes all of these ideas in a paper aptly entitled, "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt." Referring to Toni Morrison's phrase that art is "the fully realized presence of a haunting" of history, Bhabha claims that a postmodern critic must "attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" ("Introduction," 12). I agree with Bhabha that what this means is that the history of colonialism must become an integral part of the postmodern, and that race and ethnicity must be an important consideration in social production and cultural representation.

Biblical Criticism and Social Change

While Moore, the champion of deconstructive biblical studies, seems to present deconstruction's indeterminate freeplay as the latest development in literary criticism that biblical scholars have failed, but need to catch up to, my goal to move Markan studies into socio-political struggles is not based on such a teleological understanding.³³

³³ Such a stance actually makes Moore guilty of inconsistency on two counts: (1) while he advocates poststructuralism, the underlying teleology of his thinking is something that poststructuralism rejects; and (2) in light of deconstruction's recent move into oppositional politics, Moore himself may be falling behind as he accuses others of not keeping up with the development in the larger field of literary criticism. At other times, Moore seems to see deconstruction as a means to undercut biblical authority, although such a purpose is only indirectly hinted at and never explicitly expressed (for example, *Literary Criticism*, 120). Most of the time, he gives the impression that he sees biblical deconstruction as nothing but the latest adventure to cure "blandness" (for example, *Literary Criticism*, 129). Ironically enough, Moore himself acknowledges a shift toward the political in Derrida as well as in the North American importation of deconstruction (for example, *Literary Criticism*, 147 n. 19; and Moore, *Mark and Luke*, xvi); such acknowledgments, however, do not move Moore's deconstruction of the Bible beyond "différance" and "aporia."

Instead, my project is motivated by my commitment to social change and liberation for all people who are oppressed.³⁴ This commitment has certainly also played a determining role in my appropriations of the postmodern and deconstruction. As Andrew Ross, talking about the postmodern, writes, "terms are by no means guaranteed their meanings, and . . . these meanings can be appropriated and redefined for different purposes, different contexts, and, more important, different causes" ("Introduction," xi).

I hope I have made it clear in the preceding pages that there are different and competing understandings of what the postmodern and deconstruction are about. In my understanding of the postmodern, the intertwining relationship among knowledge, perspective, and power has also led to a realization that one should probe, and be honest about one's locations and concerns as much as possible. Many feminist critics, like Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty, have attacked deconstruction's emphasis on indeterminacy as a refusal to face and acknowledge a critic's own situatedness. On the other hand, Trinh writes, "There will be much less arrogance, much less it-goes-without-saying assumptions, much less taken-for-granted dominance . . . if the making subject is always vulnerably exposed in his or her making process" (*Framer*, 184). Hutcheon goes so far as to say that this exposure is "the only genuine 'Historicity'" in postmodernism (*Poetics*, 24). In a way, this chapter is my way to "lay out my cards." On the political continuum of liberalism that ranges from free-market

³⁴ According to C. West, the alignment of relatively privileged individuals and systemically dispossessed people is a defining characteristic of cultural politics ("New Cultural Politics," 19–20). The postmodern view that "knowledge" is "interested" rather than "will-less" is, of course, available in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (see also Habermas, *Knowledge*). Tolbert ("Afterwords: Politics and Poetics," 18–20), talking about biblical interpretations, further points out that the postmodern understandings of language as constitutive of reality, and of the inseparability of subject and object, have led to two results: (1) the locus of interpretation has shifted from hermeneutics to rhetoric; and (2) biblical interpretations, as attempts to persuade people to follow your views, can generate powerful influences. I am also indebted to the insights provided by various liberation theologians. As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes, "... liberation theologies . . . have maintained that the goal of biblical interpretation is not only explanation and understanding but ultimately a new and different praxis . . . the point of departure for liberation theologies is not the question of the modern *nonbeliever*, the question of faith and reason, but the struggle of the *nonperson* for justice, liberation, salvation, and well-being" (*But She Said*, 177; see also Severino J. Croatto). For formalists who worship aesthetic, fundamentalist/evangelical Christians who believe in the transcendence of "pure faith," and modernists who idolize "objective truth," such a point of departure is certainly unacceptable.

capitalism on one end to social and economic justice on the other, I am situating myself on the side that emphasizes the latter. Many things may have raised my consciousness about the need for social and economic justice, but I think they include at least the following: being born and raised in colonial Hong Kong; church teachings about a loving and just God who created all human beings as equal; attending an almost all-white college in the United States which had no more than fifty minority and international students; marrying a white woman and becoming a first-generation immigrant; working in the doubly marginalized situation among Chinese communities in Toronto, Canada; and, last but not least, the education I have received.

From beginning to end—from its initial conception, through the gathering of information, to the development of arguments—my project is guided by the specific goal of using biblical criticism as a form of socio-political criticism against oppression and injustice. Acknowledging this task-specific nature of my project means that it can boast no epistemological, ontological, or inherent superiority over other interpretations of Mark. Mine is simply a different interpretation, with a differing set of concerns, questions, and considerations. Saying that, however, does not mean that dialogue is no longer possible; but it does mean that dialogue first requires a discussion of each interpreter's starting points and finishing goals. What consumes our time and energy most may no longer be the "correctness" of interpretations, but the purposes and interests behind each interpretation. That development is, in my opinion, what makes biblical studies "post-modern."³⁵

³⁵ My goal to use biblical criticism as a form of socio-political criticism against oppression and injustice echoes the desire of many postmodern and postcolonial critics. Whether it is Foucault's "specific intellectual" (*Power/Knowledge*, 142), Said's "postcolonial intellectual" (*World*, 9, 53), or C. West's "critical organic catalyst" ("Theory," 30–35)—which is an adaptation of Antonio Gramsci's "organic intellectual" (*Selections*, 348–365; see C. West, *Prophetic Fragments*, 271), we believe in dismantling the boundaries between theory and practice, and thus the responsibility to participate in social challenges against dominant cultures. This is well articulated by Fraser, who says, "In relation to our academic disciplines, we function as the oppositional wing of an expert public. In relation to extra-academic social movements . . . we function as the expert wing of an oppositional public" (quoted in Clayton, *Pleasures*, 54). To see how this line of thinking is expressed and developed within the specific field of religion and theology, consult William A. Beardslee; and Dean, 101–150. Trinh (*Woman*, 10–13), however, insightfully points out that the assumption of such a stance on the part of the critics should involve an acknowledgment of guilt, both in terms of past privileges and present self-positionings as

Why is biblical criticism significant to the larger project of social change? Northrop Frye, citing William Blake but narrowing his focus, refers to the Bible as "the Great Code" of western literature (xi, xvi, 33). In a way that may be seen as an anticipation of postmodern sensibilities, this Canadian literary critic equates the Bible to a myth that shapes the identity and ideas of western Europe.³⁶ While Frye limits his discussion to literature up to the eighteenth century C.E., Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 14) correctly points out that the Bible has not only molded the development of western arts like painting, sculpture, and drama, it is also a "present," "living tradition" that consumes people's passion.³⁷

In another setting, Tolbert ("Reconstituting the World") talks about the repressive role the Bible has played in dehumanizing and disenfranchising non-Christians (often meaning non-Europeans), blacks, Jews, women, and homosexuals. Similarly, Vincent Wimbush (98–99) acknowledges the "cultural capital" the Bible represents in the United States. He sees the Bible as a cultural icon that helps justify this country's independence, its cruelty against native Indians, its practice of slavery, as well as its imperialistic policies both within and without.³⁸ Using a language that reminds one of Frye, both Dean

"prophets" who lead and inspire an otherwise helpless and passive people (see also Stuart Hall for a helpful discussion of both the political importance and political limits of intellectual work). Rather than understanding critics and masses in a hierarchical manner, it is more helpful to see the two in a relationship that feed off of one another in an interdependent and mutually enabling manner. I also see Trinh's comment about how power may be used for different ends as a much needed corrective to Bové's (*Intellectuals*) "broad-brush" attack on the (reactionary) power of intellectuals.

³⁶ According to Frye, Marxism also has its roots in the Bible by way of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (xx). The significance of the Bible to western literature can be seen by the number of literary critics Moore lists as having "wrestled seriously with it [the Bible]" (*Literary Criticism*, xvi n. 11); Moore's list includes Robert Alter, Mieke Bal, Barthes, Harold Bloom, Derrida, Frye, René Girard, Geoffrey Hartman, Frank Kermode, Julia Kristeva, Louis Marin, J. Hillis Miller, Walter Ong, Meir Sternberg and others.

³⁷ Notice that Blake's original statement refers to the Bible as "the Great Code of Art" (*Poetry*, 271). Tolbert attributes the Bible's continual "relevance" to liturgy, homily, and Bible study. The connection of the Bible to cultural and political hegemony can be seen in another statement by Blake; Blake writes, "The foundation of Empire is Art and Science. Remove them or degrade them and the Empire is no more. Empire follows Art [of which the Bible is, according to Blake, "the Great Code"] and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose" (*Selected Poetry*, 447).

³⁸ Spivak ("Scattered Speculations," 278–279) emphasizes the importance to distinguish "internal colonization" (the exploitation and domination of marginalized groups within the United States) and "external colonization" (the domination of the United States, whether culturally, economically, or politically, over other areas of

(xvii–xx, 3–12) and Charles Mabee (108–109) cite previous studies to talk about a Puritan “myth” of American exceptionalism that was founded on the Bible.³⁹ In addition, Werner Sollors (81–86) has related the New Testament to the “melting-pot” language of both J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and Israel Zangwill.

The importance of the Bible is again evident in our latest general election. For instance, I read an article in the newspaper (“GOP”) about a Republican congressional candidate from Alabama who not only quoted Bible passages to explain away the evil of slavery, but also tried to credit southern slave-owners for teaching slaves about the Bible, and converting them to Christianity. Driving home one night around the time of the election, I heard a radio interview with a self-proclaimed Democrat who said he could not vote for the Democratic candidate (Charlotte Pritt, who eventually lost) for Governor of West Virginia, because he was a born-again Christian, and the Bible was, according to him, clearly against women in public office. Considering that the Bible has been a major justification of, or contribution to, the dark sides of western histories and cultures, it is little wonder that the protagonist in Gus Lee’s *China Boy* (80) was told that every oppressive behavior of his Anglo-American stepmother can be explained in the Bible.⁴⁰

If the Bible has been such an esteemed and influential book, especially in the hands of existing powers, its criticism can also become

the world). For Jean Baudrillard (13–106), such “internal colonization,” which was so pronounced during the Ronald Reagan years, is consistent with the Puritan myth that the United States is utopia realized or achieved. Arthur P. Mendel (274–276), on the other hand, relates Reagan’s fascination with nuclear power—an important ingredient to “external colonization”—to his fundamentalist belief in the apocalypse. Rigidly speaking, one may differentiate colonization as formal acts of territorial occupation through military power, and imperialism as ideological positions that range from military expansion to economic/cultural hegemony and feelings of racial superiority. Chow (8–10), however, has pointed out how a rigid definition of “coloniality” may actually blind us to certain forms of political exploitation; as a result, I will use these terms interchangeably from time to time.

³⁹ There are numerous studies on this subject, including, for example, Conrad Cherry; Giles Gunn; Bruce Kuklick; Reinhold Niebuhr; and Luis N. Rivera-Pagán.

⁴⁰ The significance of the Bible in western societies is generally assumed if not explicitly acknowledged. For example, in Louis Mardee’s study of Shakespeare’s reputation, he concludes his positive appraisal of Shakespeare with this statement: “When life is discovered elsewhere in the universe and some interplanetary traveler brings to this new world the fruits of our terrestrial culture, who can imagine anything but that among the first books carried to the curious strangers will be a Bible and the works of William Shakespeare?” (362). The importance of other books may need to be argued for in great length, but in the end, the point of reference is still the accepted prominence of the Bible.

an important and effective weapon for change and liberation. In the words of Sinfield (*Faultlines*, 26) but substituting his emphasis on Shakespeare with that of the Bible, I can say that what we make of the Bible is important politically because it affects what the Bible makes of us.

Summary

The political turn within Derrida's deconstruction movement may be one example of how postmodern sensibilities understand the positive association between art and activism. Considering the influence the Bible has had in western culture in general, and in this country in particular, the Bible is already a part of cultural politics, and very much a factor in the socio-political realm. My commitment to social change, however, means that I want to use Markan studies to facilitate liberation rather than legitimate oppression. For me, simply ignoring or "trashing" such an instrumental book is counter-productive. What I seek is a way to, in Rich's vocabulary, "re-vision" ("When We Dead Awaken," 35), to read an old, perhaps even familiar text like Mark with new critical eyes so that I may engage it in the flesh and blood struggles of human beings for liberation. This I believe I have found in the postmodern theory of intertextuality, or more specifically, what I call an "inter(con)textual" reading of Mark. It is to this theory that we will turn our attention in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

INTER(CON)TEXTUALITY: QUESTIONS OF TEXTUALITY, SUBJECTIVITY, AND AGENCY

Whether it is a celebration of artistic coherence or a demonstration of textual instabilities, my discontent with most literary studies of Mark is their inability to push their inquiries beyond the confines of the literary text. In harmony with my goal to use New Testament criticism to help bring about social change and liberation, I will instead take seriously the thought that Mark's Gospel is a piece of colonial literature written under Roman colonization.¹ As an underlying orientation that informs the whole development of my project, I will use the postmodern theory generally known as "intertextuality." The irony of using a so-called "western" theory, or (considering Europe's imperialist history) what Audre Lorde calls the "master's tool," to explore colonial dynamics is not lost on myself, nor do I expect it to be lost on the reader.² Consequently, I am compelled to outline

¹ Most introductions to the New Testament give this piece of information regarding Roman colonization as pertinent background materials, some with quite detailed accounts; see, for example, Helmut Koester, 281-412; Norman Perrin and Dennis C. Duling, 15-21. Interpretations of individual New Testament books (with perhaps the exception of the book of Revelation) have, however, rarely been informed by this political situation. For a helpful discussion on Markan scholarship regarding Mark's authorship, its date, and its place of composition, see Frank J. Matera, 1-17.

² I want to thank Fernando F. Segovia for pushing me to think through this very important question. Within postcolonial theory and criticism, part of this debate revolves around the issue of language; that is, whether postcolonial writings should be done in the colonizer's language or a "native" vernacular (for example, Chinua Achebe, *Morning*, 75-79, 91-103; and Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 4-33, 63-86). My response here is greatly indebted to insights and examples shared by Spivak (*Post-Colonial Critic*, 12, 69) and Trinh (*Framer*, 128-129, 140, 163-164; *Moon*, 107-108, 157; and *Woman*, 88), who have been asked of similar questions by both their own minority communities and dominant groups (see also Bhabha, "Commitment," 31-39). Note also that my response here does not deal with what may be considered a more underlying question: Lorde, of course, assumes that one cannot use the "master's tools" to destroy the "master's house"; but if one does not accept that assumption, then, strategically speaking, is there something to be said about fighting the "master" on the "master's" ground with the "master's" own methods?

my rationale for my choice of theory before outlining the particulars of the theory itself.³

Using "Western" Theory: Pragmatism Over Purism

My rationale for using "western" theories is threefold: (1) a commitment to pragmatism; (2) a recognition of difference; and (3) an acknowledgment of history. By pragmatism, I mean a willingness to learn and employ whatever theory that may further my purpose of using biblical criticism as a form of socio-political critique.⁴ What matters is not where a theory comes from, but where it leads. If it is true that marginalized people are often socialized to see their own as well as the dominant point of view, then let's put this broader horizon to our use. It is my assertion that questions of hegemony and social change should always take precedence over those of roots and purity. It is important, of course, that theories—whether "western," "eastern" or whatever—are used discriminatorily. The employment of a theory should always be accompanied by its interrogation, through which its limits may be expanded, or its lacunae filled in. But regardless of origin, what is useful should always be used.

By recognition of difference, I refer not to an "apartheid notion of difference" (Trinh, *Framer*, 185) that sees and segregates the world into simple black and white; instead, I mean the realization that not all "western" theorists occupy the same social location. Derrida grew up as an Algerian Jew; and, as Susan Stanford Friedman (159–160) points out, Kristeva, who coined the term "intertextuality" in 1969, is "triply colonized" as a female Bulgarian expatriate in France. Bakhtin, whose thoughts have much influence on Kristeva, was an invalid with one leg who was arrested and exiled to central Asia because of his involvement with the underground church against Stalinism. Rather than a "wholesale write-off" of all "western" theories, one needs to understand Trinh's often repeated statement that

³ By dealing with the particulars of intertextual theory here, I seek to (1) give proper acknowledgment to theorists who have informed my work; and (2) eliminate theoretical digression that may interrupt my interpretation of Mark in the following chapters.

⁴ For a discussion of pragmatism, see C. West, "Theory," 22–24; and C. West, *American Evasion*.

there is a "third world" in every "first world," and a "first world" in every "third world" (see, for example, *Moon*, 148).⁵

This refusal to use "western" or "first world" theories—a kind of cultural territorialism that "fossilizes" different cultures in distinctly separate and definable spaces—is finally, in my opinion, untenable in light of history. Considering my personal experience of growing up under the British educational system in Hong Kong, and then receiving my undergraduate and graduate training in the United States, for me to go look for some "pure," "indigenous" theories is not only a denial of my personal history, but also the history of all cultures. As Said suggests, "the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings" (*Culture*, 216–217).⁶ Chow has argued, for example, that French poststructuralism actually began when critics like Derrida and Kristeva "'turned East' to China for philosophical and political alternatives" (18; see also Lisa Lowe). Just like Pablo Picasso and Bertholt Brecht who used African sculpture and Southeast Asian theaters to advance their work, I will also use "western" literary

⁵ Trinh (*Moon*, 76, 107–108; and *Framer*, 144), of course, also reminds us that multiculturalism refers to not only differences among various cultures, but also differences within each one. For a good deconstruction of the "first world/third world" binarism, see Kim Yong Ik's wonderful short story, "They Won't Crack It Open." Jameson ("Third World Literature") is guilty of this neglect of differences in his overgeneralized distinction between "first" and "third" world literature. For those interested in the construction of the "third world," see Barbara Harlow, 4–7.

⁶ In the same context, Said (*Culture*, 248) cites the following quote from the West Indian Black Marxist historian C. L. R. James:

How am I to return to non-European roots? If it means that Caribbean writers today should be aware that there are emphases in their writing that we owe to non-European, non-Shakespearean roots, and the past in music that is not Beethoven, that I agree. But I don't like them posed there in the way they have been posed *either-or*. I don't think so. I think *both* of them. And fundamentally we are a people whose literacy and aesthetic past is rooted in Western European civilization.

Rather than diminishing specificity, this acknowledgment of history should increase it. It should, for example, lead to an awareness regarding differences between diasporic and native cultures. Although such differences are admittedly becoming increasingly blurry because of globalization and increased travel, problems faced by minorities in the United States may not be identical or directly comparable to those of their brothers and sisters at "home," both before and after military colonization. Acknowledging this "impurity" of cultures should also give one the freedom to critique his or her culture of origin when necessary rather than "romanticizing" it to one's own harm (Spivak, *Post-Colonial Critic*, 64, 83, 93; and Abdul R. JanMohamed). This emphasis on cultural hybridity—not just for the once dominated or marginalized, but for all cultures—has been effectively used by many postmodern and post-colonial critics to resist the insatiable desire of the dominant to categorize and classify; see, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa; and Renato Rosaldo.

theories to further my purposes.⁷ Or as Appiah remarks, referring to a sculpture, *Man with a Bicycle*, which is the creation of an African artist:

... [the sculpture] is produced by someone who does not care that the bicycle is the white man's invention: it is not there to be Other to the Yoruba Self; it is there because someone cared for its solidity; it is there because it will take us further than our feet will take us; it is there because machines are now as African as novelists... and as fabricated as the Kingdom of Nakem ("Post- in Postmodernism," 357).

Blurring Texts and Contexts

Rather than buying into the categorical thought pattern that rejects the use of "western" theories, I take theories to be public properties available for anyone who desires to put them to use. This understanding

⁷ To understand this, one must expand his or her understanding of difference as merely conflicts to one that creates. Likewise, one must move beyond the limits of rigid identity politics, or what Nancy K. Miller calls in *Getting Personal*, the politics of speaking "as a" (x). Predicating one's politics (including knowledge, methodology, and strategy) on identity, identity politics has been implicated on four potential dangers: (1) it fosters an essentialist, incommensurable position that, say, excludes men from feminist issues, or whites from racist concerns; (2) this essentialist incommensurability, in turn, creates unnecessary internal strife among minority critics as "purity" or "authenticity," like Aimé Césaire's *négritude* or Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*, become bones of contention; (3) this search for "authenticity" turns minority critics into what Appiah calls "alterity machines" ("Post- in Postmodernism," 342–356), or people who engage in what Frank Chin calls "food pornography" or "cultural pornography" ("Railroad," 3), by mindlessly and obsessively cranking out "differences" for consumption and profit (see also Yi Hou Wen); and (4) questions of difference can thus be classified, shelved, put in separate little boxes, and, in other words, quarantined and colonized (see JanMohamed). Chow (10–15), using the term "Maoist" to refer to those who build their careers on an excessive admiration and fantasy for "third world natives," argues that "Maoist" and "Orientalist" are, despite their appearances as political enemies in terms of their respective ideologies, really political siblings in light of the similar socio-political effects they help bring about. While there are critics who, in reaction to the problems mentioned above, advocate the end of "identity talks" (for example, Kristeva, "Woman," 102–103, 137; and Kristeva, "Oscillation," 166–167; I consider the assertion of difference and identity necessary in a culture that feigns homogeneity. In the process of such assertions, however, we must remember, yet once more, Spivak's "strategic essentialism," and its unceasing self-critique (otherwise, Spivak suggests that this kind of biological or cultural determinism often leads to "tokenization" and "ghettoization"; see her *Post-Colonial Critic*, 37–39, 59–62, 104, 108–109, 121, 158, 165–166). Emphasizing multiple identities and moving towards political coalitions are two other ways that have been proposed to help remedy the dangers of rigid identity politics (for example, Paul Gilroy; Kobena Mercer; and Donna J. Haraway). Two important and often-cited critiques of identity politics are Judith Butler and Diana Fuss.

that theories (and other literary texts) become public properties as soon as they are articulated is also a key element within the theory of "intertextuality." In contrast to the study of "influence" which establishes a hierarchy of authority among authors by measuring imitation, valuing innovation, and deciding priority, "intertextuality" democratizes the literary field by refusing to privatize literary work (Clayton and Eric Rothstein, "Figures," 17).⁸

By "refusing to privatize literary work," I mean more than just the resistance to the study of influence; the theory of intertextuality, reflecting postmodern sensibilities, also insists on a web of relationships between a literary work and other non-literary forces. In Barthes' vocabulary ("From Work to Text"), we need to change from talking about literary "works" (with all the implications of unity and separateness) to the criss-crossing nature of literary "texts." As Spivak explains it, "text-ing" signifies "a weaving as in text-ile" ("Inscriptions," 202), a "weaving" that involves various literary and socio-political "texts."⁹

It is important to realize, then, the term "textuality" within the word "intertextuality" often has a double meaning. In addition to language that is expressed in speech or in print, it also refers to a

⁸ In that sense, I agree with Friedman (151-152) that the theory of intertextuality is a progressive, liberalizing, and even postcolonial practice. For an excellent illustration of such an understanding of the theory, see Lynn Keller, 222-239. For those who may be interested in the study of "influence," see Bloom.

⁹ To follow up on my previous note regarding the postcolonial elements within the theory of intertextuality, various postcolonial critics have come to assume this understanding of intertextuality in their critical work, although they may not necessarily identify the theory by name. Said's so-called "contrapuntal reading" (*Culture*, 13-14, 51-73, 105, 114, 135-136, 259), for example, specifies the importance of attending to the cultural texts of colonialism and nationalism in the interpretation of various novels; Bhabha ("Postcolonial Authority," 66-67), likewise, talks about how the racial, political, international and institutional situations must be "read" in the controversies surrounding Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. More and more literary critics have also adopted this intertextual understanding in the last ten years. For example, Robert Scholes contends that a critic must "make the object of study the whole intertextual system of relations that connects one text to others . . . the matrix or master code that the literary text both depends upon and modifies" (31, 33); similarly, Gerald Graff declares that "the meaning of any text in itself depends for its comprehension on other texts and textualized frames of reference" (*Professing Literature*, 256). Inspired by Bakhtin, Jameson (*Political Unconscious*), talks about a text's "political unconscious," or an implicit narrative of class struggle that Marxist theories can make explicit. Recently, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (10-12), emphasizing the terms "contexts" and "texts," has suggested a similar approach to read Asian American literature. I am indebted to Rachel C. Lee for recommending S. C. Wong's book to me in a personal note three years ago.

network of cultural, economic, and socio-political strands or factors that engulfs each and every phenomenon (see Spivak, *Post-Colonial Critic*, 25, 120–121). As a result, intertextuality has to do with more than just the loaning or borrowing of words and ideas among specific literary texts, but the connection of a literary text and its non-literary text or context.

This intertextual understanding, however, must be taken within the framework of postmodern sensibilities. Otherwise, it may become another empiricist or positivistic method that promises the reward of the one, true meaning to those who can establish the “right” context of a text—an approach that often turns a literary text into a mere reflection or illustration, and the literary field a “colony” of history (Pease, “Toward a Sociology,” 135).¹⁰ As I outlined briefly in the previous chapter, postmodern thinking reminds us that a so-called “context” is also a text; it is “construed textually . . . ‘always already’ textualized or mediated by sign systems of one sort or another” (Thomas Schaub, 182). What we know is always dependent on what we can say. Our knowledge of “reality,” our grasp of “context” is inseparable from “our talk, our sentences, our discourse, our texts” (Spivak, *Post-Colonial Critic*, 17). What postmodern sensibilities deny is not that events happen and facts exist, but that human beings can relate to them in any meaningful way without human perspectives, mediations, and representations (for example, Hayden White, *Metahistory*; White, *Content*; and White, “Real”).¹¹

¹⁰ While Pease presents such an approach in the language of colonization, Benita Parry (32–33) questions the contradiction that current postcolonial studies often resort to the same empiricism after they expose the ideological elements within colonialist portrayals of “reality.” For examples that assume such a mechanistic relationship between cultural productions and their social contexts, see Frances Rust’s work on dance styles, or E. D. Hirsch’s emphasis on the “historical horizon” of literary texts. While new historicism claims to be “new” by refusing to privilege an autonomous author, I still find its (over)confidence placed in context, and its one-directional influence from “context” to text problematic (see Lynn Hunt). I agree with Lentricchia (100–101) that this kind of “one-way determinism” ends up neutralizing the political potential of writers and critics.

¹¹ Here is a somewhat lengthy, but very helpful quote on this concept by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (108):

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought. . . . An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists. . . . But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of “natural phenomena” or “expressions of the wrath of God” depends upon the structure of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the

Not only is a literary text never a passive, unmediated reflection of its "context," it also has the capacity and ability to participate actively in creating and changing the non-literary world (see Holquist, *Dialogism*, 63; and Mario Valdés). There is a difference between problematizing a literary portrayal of the "real" world, and separating literary productions entirely from the external world.¹² To stay within the metaphor of "text as weaving," users of the intertextual approach need to remember that weaving is more often than not a very productive activity, not unlike "spinning a yarn" to describe "telling or making up a story" in the English language.¹³ In other words, the postmodern theory of intertextuality assumes something akin to Colin Sumner's "circle of social reality" (288); it asserts that literary texts influence even as they are themselves influenced by external socio-political forces.¹⁴ It stands between the polar extremes of empiricist

rather different assertion that they would constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence.

By now, it is certainly nothing new to equate re-presentation with interpretation. As early as 1825, Thomas Hardy has already made the statement that "each historian accommodates the facts to his [*sic.*] ideas, almost in the same manner as a cook sauces up his [*sic.*] dishes to his [*sic.*] palate" (quoted in David Vincent, 10). And again in 1922, the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács made the same point in *History and Class Consciousness* (204). The disappointing thing is, even after two more decades of work on White's part to bring this specific topic to attention, his arguments are often ignored or forgotten. For an excellent discussion concerning the limits and importance of postmodern history writing, see Carolyn Steedman. For a more practical demonstration regarding the unreliability of "history" or archival records, see Spivak, "Rani."

¹² As Brantlinger (*Crusoe's Footprints*, 22) points out, those are both possible interpretations of Derrida's controversial dictum that "there is nothing outside the text" (*Of Grammatology*, 158). I reject it if it is taken to mean that one may dismiss "context" in favor of an autonomous literary text; I adopt it if it is used to express the view that "reality" is inevitably a textualized re-presentation.

¹³ Laura E. Donaldson (286) has recently suggested that the metaphor of weaving or stitching is better replaced by that of "suturing." According to her, "suturing," whether understood in a medical sense or in the realm of film making, highlights the activities of covering or editing, and thus the ideological elements involved in writing.

¹⁴ Lentricchia (160–161) uses Kenneth Burke's metaphor of conversation to illustrate this circular relationship between human agency and external, material conditions. Burke (110–111) writes:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion. . . . You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar.

While outside forces have an impact on how human beings write, speak, or act, our words and actions may also effect changes on these very forces. Another

and formalist criticism. Recognizing the complexities of representation and interpretation, intertextuality concurs with White's conclusion in *Metahistory* that rhetoric becomes fundamental. Believing at the same time in the dynamic and transforming potential of literary productions, inter-textuality insists on a connection between the literary and the non-literary.

In contrast to the old, hierarchical understanding that sees the relationship of "context" and "text" in terms of "background" and "foreground," I understand the interchange between literary texts and socio-political texts as an indication that literary texts signify the boundary of meanings at specific junctures of history. As Belsey writes, there is "a history of . . . meanings which delimit at a specific moment what it is possible to say, to understand, and consequently to be" (*Subject*, x; see also Michèle Barrett). Seeing the Gospels as culturally embedded and historically particular—that is, as cultural products as well as cultural interventions at a particular moment of history—diminishes their transcendent status, and thus their authority. Instead, the Gospels can be understood as serious attempts to intervene in the socio-cultural and political forces of a specific time and place, but their specificities also mean that they can be challenged.¹⁵ Inter(con)textualizing the Gospels in this way may also provide a new twist to an old program of New Testament studies known as "demythologization." Taking "myths" to be primarily symbols of pre-modern people, Rudolf Bultmann (*Jesus Christ and Mythology*), undeniably contextualizes the New Testament; but his "demythologization" lacks the critical edge I have in mind. Like Frye (32–34, 51), who links the cultural authority of the Bible with mythology, Bultmann understands myths "reverently . . . to refer to essential, characteristic cultural forms" (Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints*, 29), and his approach

metaphor that makes basically the same point can be found in how Spivak uses the Derridean concept of the "mother tongue"; see Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge," 27–28.

¹⁵ This approach is similar to one of the four strategies identified by Sinfield ("Four Ways"), for oppositional critics to deal with texts that have been used for reactionary purposes. His other ways are (1) enlarging the canon with different texts; (2) reinterpreting reactionary texts into progressive texts; and (3) refusing to settle within formalism. In a later book (*Faultlines*, 22), Sinfield identifies yet a fifth strategy: "creative vandalism," or the blatant rewriting of authoritative texts. While Pease ("Toward a Sociology," 117) gives Césaire's rewriting rather than re-reading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as an example, I will offer an example of "creative vandalism" within biblical studies in Schüssler Fiorenza, "Practice," 192–193.

ends up affirming the transcendence of the New Testament message if not that of the New Testament language.

In contrast to Bultmann, I am using the term “myth” in Barthes’ sense, who understands myth as “depoliticized speech . . . [with] the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal” (*Mythologies*, 142; see also Graff, “American Criticism”). Barthes continues, “The very end of myth is to immobilize the world . . . [and prevent] man [*sic.*] against inventing himself [*sic.*]” (155). For me, then, mythology functions as a form of mystification; and “demythologizing” the New Testament means “demystifying” it, “re-politicizing” it, or “inter(con)textualizing” it.

Intertextual Studies of Biblical Texts

Let the reader understand that I am not trying to present intertextuality in an authoritative manner, endeavoring to keep everybody in line with what the theory *really means* by appealing patriarchally to the “original” ideas of some founding masters.¹⁶ Intertextuality has multiple paths, and includes many different kinds of work. For example, Clayton and Rothstein (“Figures,” 19–29) identify three such paths: (1) a deconstructive path that features indeterminacy and free-play; (2) a semiotic path that promises a greater certainty of what a literary text means; and (3) a socio-political path that studies the relationships between literary and non-literary texts, or the connections between textuality and power.¹⁷ To acknowledge that the theory may mean many different things to different people, however, does not mean that the choices one makes are insignificant; it makes a marked difference whether intertextuality is understood in one way or another

¹⁶ In the midst of differences and disagreements, I am presenting an understanding of intertextuality that I think will contribute to move contemporary Gospel studies into oppositional politics. Many theorists have contributed to the theory of intertextuality, the most commonly cited ones include Bakhtin, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Frye, Kristeva, Lacan, and Michael Riffaterre. Clayton and Rothstein (“Figures,” 4) have pointed out the irony that while departing from the hierarchy of “influence,” discussions of intertextuality have often become debates of influence: namely, arguments about the authority of different theorists and the meanings of their ideas.

¹⁷ Clayton and Rothstein (“Figures,” 3–4, 28–29) further suggest that while the theory of intertextuality started in Europe and its deconstructive path has enjoyed immense popularity within continental scholarship, North American critics have generally opted to emphasize the socio-political path instead. For Friedman (155, 160),

(Ken Hirschkop). Waetjen expresses this when he writes, "if the social construction of reality is also a product of the activity of interpretation, which hermeneutical mode and which interpretive system prevail has profound implications for the future of human beings" ("Social Location," 93). Or, in the words of Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat in response to Alice's request for directions in the Wonderland: the path one takes "depends a good deal on where you want to get to" (124).

The paths identified by Clayton and Rothstein may also serve as a good heuristic model to map the applications of intertextuality to biblical studies. Intertextuality is, first of all, taken by some to be a more sophisticated model for the old tradition of studying scriptural allusions, whether the allusions under consideration are inter-testamental or intra-testamental in nature. As Adam defines it, intertextuality is "the principle that every text is constituted by other texts; every text borrows words and ideas from predecessor texts, and loans them to successors" (64). As a result, Richard Hays uses the term "intertextuality" to describe his effort to study the "echoes" of Hebrew scriptures within Pauline epistles; Danna Nolan Fewell uses the term to refer to the relationships among different texts within the Hebrew Bible; and George Wesley Buchanan, who is presently also editing the *Mellen Intertextual Biblical Commentary*, basically equates intertextuality with the midrashic practice of using scriptures to comment on another passage of scriptures. This understanding of intertextuality as allusions also aptly describes the approach of three major studies on Mark that mention "intertextuality" specifically: Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (69-70); Burton Mack (321-323); and Myers (97-99). More often than not, such an approach tends to establish a boundary by appealing, implicitly or explicitly, to a form of authorial intention (Schaub, 184-185). It practically, then, merges with the semiotic path that promises a greater certainty of meaning, although semiotic theory is not necessarily employed. Robert Brawley, for instance, quotes Bakhtin and Riffaterre to argue that Luke's allusions to Hebrew scripture in

this refusal to follow a certain line of "orthodoxy" is yet another indication of post-colonial resistance. For Moore, on the other hand, this difference is an indication of "domestication" (*Literary Criticism*, 54). To observe the differences between European and North American understandings of intertextuality, one may compare Clayton and Rothstein to Heinrich Plett; both of these collections of essays on intertextuality came out in the same year (1991), but originated from different sides of the Atlantic. See also Thaïs Morgan for an account of the theory from T. S. Eliot to Foucault.

his passion narrative are “overdetermined,” or intended, to express hope in God’s deliverance. Perhaps the best, and thus somewhat extreme, illustration of this positivistic path is found in Jean Calloud, who uses A. J. Greimas’ semiotic understanding of figuration to argue for both the unity of biblical texts, and the universality of the biblical message.

Taking the study of allusions as something closer to the theory of influence than that of intertextuality, and being dissatisfied with its emphasis on authorial intention, George Aichele and Phillips attempt to provide a “thicker” notion of intertextuality in the issue of *Semeia* entitled *Intertextuality and the Bible* (“Introduction,” 7). What that extra “thickness” refers to is “an expansive, even contradictory range of meanings” (Aichele and Phillips, “Introduction,” 8). In other words, it is the deconstructive path of indeterminacy and freeplay, as evidenced by the following definitive statement: “reading the Bible intertextually . . . means nothing less than a deconstructive search for the inherent conflicts, tensions, and aporias in the transposition of systems and subjectivities” (Aichele and Phillips, “Introduction,” 11).¹⁸ In my opinion, even the arrangement of the collected essays is consistent with this emphasis; the first (Tod Linafelt and Timothy Beal) and the last (Aichele) essays are demonstrations of intertextual indeterminacy at its best, one dealing with the Hebrew Bible and the other the New Testament.

What I find wanting, along with Donaldson and Daniel Boyarin who wrote responses to Aichele and Phillips’ volume, is the general absence of the socio-political path of intertextuality within biblical studies. Tilottama Rajan’s assessment (62–63) that critics often reduce intertextuality to either “textuality” by merely relating literary texts, or “intratextuality” by freeplaying within a single literary text to highlight its contradictions, is applicable to biblical criticism. In other words, the narrow understanding of “textuality” as literary has generally limited, or in Jameson’s sense, “contained” (*Political Unconscious*, 10), intertextual studies of biblical texts within the confines of for-

¹⁸ The exploration of this deconstructive path of intertextuality has already started with Fewell. The choice that Aichele and Phillips make to travel on this path should come as no surprise to anyone who is familiar with their work. Their fascination with Derridean freeplay has, in my opinion, contributed to the “poststructuralizing” of postmodern sensibilities within biblical studies, see *The Bible and Culture Collective*.

malism.¹⁹ To foreground the differences between my own and current intertextual approaches that have dominated biblical studies, I have opted for the term “inter(con)textuality.” “(Con)Text” reminds us visually that we are dealing with more than literary texts, and that literary texts are products of socio-political forces. At the same time, the parenthesis signifies that so-called “contexts” are always already textualized and constructed, and that literary texts also have power to produce non-literary effects.

From Inter(con)textuality to Intersubjectivity

Inter(con)textuality, as an underlying theory that informs my work, is “no theoretical steroid” (Holquist, *Dialogism*, 107). It does not provide any fast, mechanical steps to interpret the Gospels. This is so especially because within inter(con)textuality, there is room for texts to be read with numerous different (con)texts. To illustrate its potential to move Gospel studies beyond formalism, and make its political implications more direct and obvious, I will approach the Gospel of Mark within the (con)text of Roman colonization. In contrast to historicist emphasis, however, I want to look at Mark’s constructions of colonial subjects in relation to its particular development of apocalyptic.

Subject positions or subjectivities, or simply how people come to see and conduct their lives, have been major questions within post-modern scholarship.²⁰ Richard Johnson, for example, links cultural

¹⁹ For example, Croatto (43–44, 54–60) also mentions the terms “intertextuality” and “intratextuality,” but only ends up merging them to refer to a form of canonical criticism. Others, like Buchanan and Fewell, give a hint of the changing understanding of “textuality” in the beginning, but the remainder of their volumes are completely occupied with the narrower understanding of “textuality” as merely literary. In all fairness, I must admit that there are several admirable attempts within Aichele and Phillips’ volume to broaden the understanding of “textuality” to include, say, movies (Roland Boer) and television shows (Susan Graham). Personally, however, I believe the theory of intertextuality can facilitate a more direct and more political engagement with the biblical texts themselves.

²⁰ According to Julian Henriques, Wendy Holloway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn, and Valerie Walkerdine (7–8), the term “subject,” in contrast to “individual,” signifies the socially constituted nature of human consciousness. For other helpful definitions of “subject,” “subject position,” and/or “subjectivity,” see Regenia Gagnier, 8–9; Paul Smith, xxxv; and Jean-Luc Nancy, 6. Many contemporary critics prefer to talk about “subject” or “subject position(s)” rather than “subjectivity,” because “subjectivity” is often understood to imply a (God-given) deposit of certain “[psychological] depths, hidden truths, and inner voices” that may, in effect, undercut any

studies with studying “historical forms of consciousness or subjectivity” (43). According to Tony Bennett (“Texts in History”; and “Putting Policy”), examinations of subject formations are becoming an urgent intellectual and political project. Likewise, Bhabha talks about “an increasing *narrativization* of question of social ethics and subject formation” (“Conclusion,” 239). Somewhat fittingly, theories of inter(con)-textuality have been intertwined with issues regarding subjects and subjectivities.

A major difference between North American and European understandings of intertextuality revolves around the question regarding the author/subject. Kristeva’s intertextual understanding causes her teacher, Barthes, to suggest in *S/Z* (10) that human subjects, like texts, are also products of criss-crossing cultural codes.²¹ However, Barthes’ emphasis on indeterminacy causes him to go on and deny the agency, and the existence of the writing subject in “The Death of the Author.” In just another short step, Derrida pronounces “the absence of every empirically determinable ‘subject’” (*Margins*, 315).

Among those who refute this fatalistic dismissal of human subject and human agency, N. K. Miller may be the most prominent theorist (at least on this side of the Atlantic) in the effort to “resurrect” the writing subject, and restore potency to human effort. Picking up on the metaphor of “text-as-weaving,” N. K. Miller (“Arachnologies”; and *Subject*, 75–106) emphasizes figures like the spider or the woman weaver to assert the importance of subject—and that of agency—for those who are not in the position to surrender flippantly status that is not yet recognized and/or grasped.²² Spivak even goes so far

meaningful exploration of the dynamics involved in subject construction, as well as limit the room for multiple and overlapping needs and interests (Chow, 29). Throughout this project, however, I am employing the term “subjectivity” without any implication of originary or initial singularity. I am indebted to Clayton for helping me sort through this problem of terminology.

²¹ Kristeva’s own understanding of the subject has often been debated. While Friedman (147–148) sees the anticipation of Barthes in the concluding section of her seminal essay, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” Rajan (70) is more ready to give her the benefit of a doubt. Kristeva’s interest in Lacan and psychoanalysis has, of course, involved her in the theorization of subjectivity. Her recent, “negative” feminist practice is, in my opinion, very much in line with Barthes’ “death-emphasis” (see Kristeva, “Oscillation”; and Kristeva, “Woman”).

²² N. K. Miller is far from being the lone voice on this subject; see, for example, B. Johnson, *World*, 45; JanMohamed and David Lloyd, “Introduction,” 15–16; and Asha Varadharajan, 15, 20, 31, 138. In addition to the “minority factor,” this difference has also been attributed to North America’s postcolonial suspicions (Friedman, 155, 160), and the contrasting experiences that people on the two sides

as to categorize most problematizations of writing subjects as “meaningless piety” (“Can the Subaltern Speak,” 271). While this may be too extreme, it illustrates that many theorists are not ready to validate the death certificate of the subject. Rajan sums up the resistance to dismiss the human subject when she writes, in reference to Søren Kierkegaard’s existential commitment, “complete erasure of the subject is an ethical abdication” (72).

This “resurrected” subject does, however, return in a “transfigured” form. A postmodern subject is no longer the unified and autonomous modern subject, the “free, unconstrained author of meaning and action” (Belsey, *Subject*, 8). Instead of a self-constituting, self-reflexive, and self-sufficient subject who is endowed with a “God-given nature” that transcends history,²³ subjects become intergenerated with language, culture, and history.²⁴ In other words, subjectivities are caught within the intertextuality of cultural, historical, and ideological influences.²⁵

of the Atlantic had coming out of the Second World War (Friedman, 157; and Spivak, “Scattered Speculations,” 274–275). Simon Critchley and Peter Dews have also argued recently that there are powerful subjects driving the movement to deconstruct subjectivities (see also Clayton and Rothstein, “Figures,” 24; and John Smith, 82).

²³ Alison Jaggar (28–29) suggests that the individual stands as the centerpiece of liberal humanism, which is based on (1) a “normative dualism” that favors the mind over the body; (2) an “abstract individualism” that neglects social circumstances; and (3) a “liberal rationality” that assumes a form of universal egoism or selfishness. Belsey (*Subject*, 8–9, 65–66, 82–86, 119–120) argues that the modern subject of liberal humanism was itself a bourgeois product of the mid-17th century C.E., that it is highly contradictory, and that it leads to problems like denial of socio-political forces, inequality of freedom, social conformity, exploitation of nature, unbridled capitalism, and imperial power. This autonomous individual of liberal humanism has also drawn heavy fire from the Critical Legal Studies movement, see Robin West (“Difference”; and “Jurisprudence”).

²⁴ It is important to note that those who champion the death of the author also understand the writing subject as the product of numerous intersecting discourse. The difference lies in their insistence that such non-essentialist/non-humanist subjectivities, like literary texts, become necessarily indeterminate, and can no longer be studied (Jonathan Goldberg, “Shakespearean Inscriptions,” 118–119). Brantlinger (*Crusoe’s Footprints*, 17), on the other hand, uses Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis as an example to argue for the continuation of subjectivity studies even if subjects are understood as fragmentary and even irrational.

²⁵ Eagleton (*Ideology*, 59–60), alluding to Norman Geras’ *Marx and Human Nature*, reminds us that this intersubjective understanding does not necessarily imply that human beings do not do certain things rather naturally, like eating and dying; how they do such “natural” things are, however, culturally constructed. To protect agency, Rothstein (121) also cautions against the temptation to completely collapse “persons” into “texts.”

The relationship between inter(con)textuality and intersubjectivity may be illustrated in the thoughts of the unclassifiable Russian theorist, Bakhtin, who is a major influence on Kristeva's intertextual understanding.²⁶ According to Bakhtin's concept of "inner speech," consciousness is constituted by an internalization of words. Subjectivity is not something that is innate; instead, it is something that we "author" for ourselves as we answer, choose and shape the range of discourse around us.²⁷ In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin uses Dostoevsky's novels to illustrate how subjectivity is constituted by narratives, and situated in socio-cultural forces.²⁸ In other words, subjectivity exists, but it is "less something 'within' us than something around and between us" (Eagleton, *Ideology*, 194).²⁹

Foucault, whom Clayton and Rothstein feature in their delineation of the socio-political path of intertextuality, is also very concerned with "the way intertextual networks . . . shape . . . our existence as social and political subjects" (Clayton and Rothstein, "Figures," 27). Underlying most of Foucault's writings is a deep interest in the discursive constitution of objects and subjects. As Foucault himself

²⁶ Characterizing Bakhtin's thoughts with the term "dialogism," Holquist writes, "it [dialogism] is in its essence a hybrid: dialogism exploits the nature of language as a modeling system for the nature of existence" (*Dialogism*, 33). To further the argument concerning the postcolonial elements within inter(con)textuality, let me also recommend Graham Pechey's article on Bakhtin, in which Pechey, despite certain reservations about the political effectiveness of Bakhtin's theories, contends that migrating Bakhtinian concepts to new territories, both in terms of disciplines and geography, are ways to further "decolonize" Bakhtin's "dialogism." If Pechey's suggestions are valid, then bringing Bakhtin into North American Gospel studies will be a good move in a postcolonial direction (see, for example, Francisco O. Garcia-Treto; and Walter L. Reed).

²⁷ This Bakhtinian concept is mainly developed in "Author and Hero" (see also V. N. Vološinov, *Freudianism*; and Vološinov, *Marxism*). "Inner speech" is a powerful critique on at least four fronts; it challenges (1) Jean-Paul Sartre's dialectic; (2) Ferdinand de Saussure's *langue/parole* schema; (3) Jean Piaget's developmental and educational theories; and (4) Freud's psychoanalysis. Helpful secondary discussions are available in Caryl Emerson, 246, 248-250, 254-255; Holquist, "Answering and Authoring," 310-311, 315-317; Holquist, *Dialogism*, 28-29, 77-82; Gary Saul Morson, "Who Speaks for Bakhtin," 232-233, 235; and Susan Stewart, "Shouts," 267, 273-274.

²⁸ For Bakhtin, our subjectivities also take on the form of a text with this continuous process of answering, choosing, and shaping the discourse around us. The ways Bakhtin associates language with ideology and constitutional power are reasons why he is often perceived as a harbinger of postmodern sensibilities. For a good discussion of Bakhtin's "anti-linguistic" understandings, as well as how they differ from speech-act theory and sociolinguistics, see Stewart, "Shouts."

²⁹ Eagleton also sees a parallel between this Bakhtinian understanding and R. Williams' "structure of feeling"; see Eagleton, *Ideology*, 47-49, 125.

declares, "Thus it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research" ("Afterword," 209). Spivak has observed that the popular translation of *pourvoir/savoir* as "power/knowledge" fails to capture this crucial aspect of Foucault's work, for the French implies "being able to do something: -only as you are able to make sense of it" ("More on Power/Knowledge," 34-35). In *The Order of Things*, Foucault traces the "archaeology" of how a modern, western subject comes into being. Understanding a human being as a product of certain arrangements of knowledge, Foucault proposes that recent rearrangement will bring about the "erasure" of the modern, western "self-made" subject. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Foucault presents discourse as a violating practice that makes things "manifest, nameable, and describable" (41) by "systematically form[ing] the objects of which they speak" (49). Foucault continues to contend in *Discipline and Punish* that discipline involves the production of various writings, and that education is a "normalization" process through which subjects become "subjected." Looking at discourse that simultaneously subjects people and turns them into subjects, Foucault suggests in *Technologies of the Self* that it is writing that leads to a new form of self-understanding, and a new emphasis on individual introspection in the Hellenistic age. Of course, Foucault's most extensive discussion of this "subjectification" process is found in his volumes on sexuality. I think Foucault would have no problem with Jeffrey Steele, who states in reference to Margaret Fuller's writings that "intersubjectivity is inter[con]textuality" (277). Literary texts, understood as socio-culturally embedded discourse, can have non-literary effects because they have a way to affect fundamentally how people see themselves, and conduct their lives.³⁰

³⁰ The interplay between inter(con)textuality and intersubjectivity has continually been theorized and examined, although the vocabularies are not necessarily employed. Feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis, for example, proposes the concept of identification to explain how readers, in order to enjoy what they read, idealize and internalize the subject positions typically offered by most narratives; namely those of male as active subject, and female as passive object. Alison Easton argues that subjects found within Nathaniel Hawthorne's writings demonstrate not just the Romantic self-understanding that dominated his period, but also the subjectivity effects of social discourse. Belsey, seeking to "re-politicize" criticism and historicize subjectivity, studies how Renaissance tragedies (*Subject*) and comedies ("Disrupting Sexual Difference") address the subject with conflicts and obstacles to define, as well as redefine, subjectivity. Describing Renaissance drama as "intersubjective drama," William Nigel Dodd theorizes how *dramatis personae* of the period simulated social exchange, reified themselves as subjects, and confronted the audience with decisions. Going back even

Agencies of Writing and Reading

In spite of Foucault's insights into the social construction of subject positions, he is guilty of over-theorizing the power of domination, and under-theorizing the agency of resistance (for example, Butler, 145; Eagleton, *Ideology*, 146, 167–172; Gagnier, 9–10; Said, "Foucault"; and Varadharajan, 5, 8, 11–12).³¹ This has been countered by theorists like Fanon (*Black Skin*) and Bhabha ("The Other Question"), who have emphasized the subject's capacity for resistance in colonial relations,³² thus leaving us with a subject that is not the powerless pawn implied by Foucault, but also not the autonomous, "self-made" individualist portrayed by liberal humanism. Instead, the subject is not only the product of socio-cultural discourse, but also

further, Anne Clark Bartlett uses Brian Stock's and Jean Leclercq's studies on reading theories of the Middle Ages to investigate how Middle English devotional literature affected female subjectivities. For more examples, see Richard H. Brodhead; Sam Girgus; Philip Shaw and Peter Stockwell; and Judith Still and Michael Worton.

³¹ Although Foucault has maintained a critical distance from the Marxist concept of ideology throughout his career because of the baggage it carries from traditional Marxism like its implication that a pre-discursive "truth" or "reality" exists, and its subordination to the all-determining material, economic base-structure), his passive understanding of intersubjectivity can certainly be read alongside Louis Althusser's work on ideology. This emphasis on the simultaneous construction and submission of the subject has also linked Foucault to the "death-of-the-subject" movement (see, for example, Foucault, "What is An Author"). Note that Moore-Gilbert (36–39) has argued recently that Said's *Orientalism* is nothing less than an attempt to bring together Foucault and Marxism (or more specifically, the work of Gramsci).

³² Both Fanon and Bhabha deal directly with Lacan, who is an important influence on Althusser's understanding of ideology. Many critics of Althusser have blamed his concept of "interpellation" on a "misreading" of Lacan; see Eagleton, *Ideology*, 144–146; and P. Smith, 14–20. For a helpful introduction to Lacan's psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity, see Juliet Mitchell; and Jacqueline Rose. This issue of resistance, or that of agency, is of course one of major concerns to post-colonial theorists. For instance, Said's *Orientalism* (which basically extends Foucault's concept of "power/knowledge" to talk about how Europeans, by making "Orientals" the subject/object of their studies, produce both European and Oriental subjectivities, and make non-Europeans their objects of imperial conquest since the Enlightenment) has been criticized as "a history of theoretical simplification" because it implies that "colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer" (Bhabha, "The Other Question," 77). The textual squabble between Spivak and Parry over the agency of the subaltern to speak should also have become well known. Parry (28–36) sees Spivak's article, "Can the Subaltern Speak," as indicative of a major problem in current postcolonial theories, which is the implied futility in re-presenting the colonized as agents (for Spivak's rebuttal, see her "Theory," 172). For the works of contemporary Marxists who try to discuss ideology without denying agency, see R. Williams, *Problems*; Sinfield, *Faultlines*; and Eagleton, *Ideology*.

a producer of such discourse. Our inter(con)textual understanding reminds us that a writing subject is "an agent, acting on and in relationship to the materials of history (which are always textual), and asserting a self as he [*sic.*] 'inserts' his [*sic.*] writing-agency into the textual trajectory of history" (Betsy Draine, 324). As Gagnier's and Harlow's studies point out (and as N. K. Miller reminds us), colonized and dominated people do "take part in the contest for meaning which issues in the production of new subject-positions" (Belsey, *Subject*, 6) with writings of their own (see also Philip D. Curtin; and Elaine H. Kim).³³ Not only do we have the potential to reject cultural constructions of subjectivities, we also have the potential to produce different subject constructions.

This agency writing subjects enjoy is, of course, transferrable to the reader, in that a reader can accept, reject or modify what he or she reads and interprets in the written text. The emphasis on the reader's agency has led to the understanding that writings cannot "unilaterally determine the response of the audience" (Belsey, *Subject*, 26). To ensure space for what Judith Fetterley calls "the resisting reader," Rajan (66-73) reminds us that in addition to the writing subject, inter(con)textuality also involves a reading subject.³⁴ Regarding this reading subject, Rajan further suggests that a distinction be made (1) between the inter(con)textual reader (the reader's "practical self";

³³ Brantlinger (*Crusoe's Footprints*, 110-111) refers to Patricia Sexton and Brendan Sexton's study on labor to point out that just resisting or rejecting the (mis)representations of the dominant powers is not enough to nullify the structure of power. The realization that "Whites told only one side [of the story]. Tell it to please themselves" (quoted in Dee Brown, 300) did not save American Indians from losing their lands and their lives. What it takes is for the dominated to participate in the discursive construction of selves and others. The significance of such participation is shown, of course, by how the dominant powers have always "claimed and exercised a certain monopoly of the coercive power of literal force" (Appiah, "Tolerable Falsehoods," 72-73). According to Moore-Gilbert (156), there is now a growing emphasis within colonial/postcolonial studies to look at counter-discourse rather than colonial discourse.

³⁴ In emphasizing the subject, Rajan also touches upon the inadequacy of reader response theories, which have definite ties with inter(con)textuality (see Clayton and Rothstein, "Figures," 26), and have been popularly used in Gospel studies in the last decade. The problem for Rajan is that both the text and the reader in reader response are seldom "historicized"; as a result, the reading *does* nothing by failing to "inscribe us in our own history" (71). The interaction between text and reader must be understood as an interaction "between the culturally activated text and the culturally activated reader, an interaction structured by the material, social, ideological, and institutional relationships in which *both* texts and readers are inescapably inscribed" (T. Bennett, "Texts, Readers," 12); see also Spivak, *Post-Colonial Critic*, 50.

and the inter(con)textual reading function (the way a reader may suspend his or her “practical self” in order to follow or enjoy a reading), and (2) between the inter(con)textual reading function (the aforementioned “self-suspense”) and the “implied reader” envisioned by the writer. With these distinctions, a reader does not only have room to choose how he or she reads *vis-à-vis* an (implied) author’s intention, a reader also has the freedom to decide whether his or her own reading has anything to say about his or her personhood.

Reading as an Inter(con)textual Dialogue

My project, then, explores colonial power relations at the inter-subjective level rather than the public sphere of guns and laws—or, in Foucault’s terms, what amounts to “discursive fact” rather than the “repressive hypothesis” (*History*, 1:10–11). What I emphasize is, in effect, a dialogical relationship between Mark’s (con)text and my own personal (con)text. My personal history—caught within the larger history of Hong Kong—is one that sensitizes me to colonial power relations, and predisposes me to “a diasporic consciousness” (Chow, 22) that refuses to idealize anything. Two of my childhood memories may serve to illustrate this sensitivity and consciousness.

For many children who grew up in colonial Hong Kong, our first encounter with British colonialism was nothing less than a literal educational experience. On the first day of class in a church-related school, we were told that we needed a “proper” name—meaning Christian and/or English—for school.³⁵ Being the fifth child of my family, I was fortunate to benefit from the experiences of my four older siblings. Since neither my father nor my mother knew English, it was my eldest sister who gave me my English name the night before my first day in school; and she did so by basically flipping through an English dictionary until she found a name that “sounded good but was not overused.” I still remember, however, the anxiety and embarrassment felt by many of my classmates as they scrambled to come up with an English name for each other, or waited nervously to receive a new name from the teacher. Feeling the “need” for an

³⁵ Because of Hong Kong’s colonial history, church-related schools continue to be viewed as the “best” schools available. Since a person does not necessarily begin his or her educational pursuit in a church-related school, one may well experience what I am describing in the high school level as well as the grade school level.

English and/or Christian name but yet unwilling to be named by a stranger, many young people from Hong Kong end up with some rather “unconventional” English names like “Apollo” or “Cinderella.”

My other childhood memory is really a cluster of memories that prompted me to distance myself from Chinese communists as well as from British colonials. Many years before Tiananmen Square (1989) and the current uproar surrounding Tibet (partly because of the release of two Hollywood movies, one featuring actor Brad Pitt, and the other director Martin Scorsese), I have become aware of the oppressions within mainland China through relatives who live under the communist regime. I remember stories about two older cousins, who, at the time of Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution, were removed from grade school, and placed in different bakery training programs without consent; to this day, my cousins remain largely illiterate. I remember my uncle and aunt who, after swimming every single day for a year in different public swimming pools (to avoid the attention of suspicious Red Guards) to build up their stamina, risked their lives in shark-infested waters for three days in order to sneak into Hong Kong in search for a better life. I remember letters from relatives telling about their need for clothing and food; and I remember when I accompanied my mother to the train station for her trip into the mainland, what I witnessed were like scenes taken directly from movies about the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong during the Second World War. The train station was filled with people, mostly middle-aged women who, like my mother, were carrying an unreasonable number of unreasonably big bags;³⁶ some, like my mother, dragged these bags along with bare hands, others had them strapped on both ends of a long bamboo pole, which they carried across their shoulders. I knew what was in my mother’s bags, and from the look of things, I knew similar things were filling other peoples’: underwears, towels, shirts, pants, socks, and canned food.³⁷

In hindsight, I now realize what I saw that morning in the train

³⁶ Suitcases did not really become popular for most people in Hong Kong until the early or mid-1970s. In the late 1960s, most middle-aged women in Hong Kong traveled with huge bags made of nylon or canvas. Even in the late 1990s, many elderly Chinese still prefer these bags to suitcases.

³⁷ Chow (20), relating similar childhood memories, talks about a woman who wore seven pairs of pants on her trip to help provide for her needy relatives. My discussion in this section is highly indebted to Chow, whose memories of Hong Kong in the late 1960s trigger in me many images and emotions that I thought I had forgotten.

station is a striking display of the parallel exploitation experienced by those who live in colonial Hong Kong and those who live in communist China. As these people pushed and ran to catch a train to provide help and relief for their relatives in mainland China, they did not only look like political refugees and fugitives themselves; more importantly, they demonstrated a loss of faith in "the system." Their pushing and shoving against each other was not a result of impatience, but because of a deep realization that having a ticket did not necessarily mean that the agreement that a ticketholder made with the train company would be honored. My mother has provided me with a lifetime of examples of this lack of faith in institutional promises. This mindset that I had always interpreted as impatience and irrational anxiety was a source of great frustration to me right up to the day it was announced that Hong Kong Chinese carrying British passports would not be allowed to settle in the United Kingdom to escape the 1997 transfer of Hong Kong back to Chinese rule.

My "diasporic consciousness" continues, of course, with my move to North America. Once again, Chow puts it so appropriately and beautifully; speaking of her own migration from Hong Kong, she becomes, in effect, "a kind of diasporic person in diaspora" (23). While I have spent the majority of the last eighteen years in the United States, my "diasporic consciousness" has been heightened, in no small measure, from two separate stints in Canada that amount to five and a half years. As Moore-Gilbert points out (10–11), Canada is perhaps the best illustration of how complex and ironic colonial relations can be. Living under the shadow of both British colonialism of yesterday and United States imperialism of today, Canada itself has internally colonized at least two significant cultures that have been making a lot of noise in the last few years: the French-speaking Quebecois and the recent, financially well-off immigrants from Hong Kong. To complicate matters even further, these two internally colonized cultures have, in turn, taken on the colonizer role *vis-à-vis* the native Indian population and the "rest" of the Chinese Canadian community respectively. For example, in the words of a former parishioner of mine who moved from Hong Kong to Canada twenty years ago and has been working as a self-employed consultant, recent investor-immigrants from Hong Kong are the worst employers, because "they will not be satisfied until they suck the last drop of blood out of their employees."³⁸

³⁸ My point here is not to compare oppression qualitatively or quantitatively.

It is with this kind of “diasporic consciousness,” this sensitivity to colonization and refusal of idealization, that I approach Mark’s Gospel. Since reading diaspora “make[s] room for reciprocal critique and multiple commitments” (Cheung King-kok, “Re-viewing,” 10; see also Said, *Culture*, xxvi–xxvii), my reading of Mark involves a simultaneous claiming and disclaiming of both Mark and my Asian American community. Colonialism, after all, involves “a corpus of attitudes, expressions, discourses, and the *value* espoused in them” (Chow, 100; see also 25); it is not limited to certain individuals, or to inter-national relationships (Arif Dirlik, 37).

This realization that “what plays?” (meaning what power dynamics are at play) is as important as—if not more important than—“who speaks?” (Chow, 146) is especially significant for my study of Mark’s Gospel. While the Bible has been used as a major weapon of cultural and imperial domination in the last two hundred years of this country’s history, my study of Mark has convinced me that Mark is, more likely than not, writing from a marginalized, thus colonized, even anti-colonial perspective (see also Tolbert, “When Resistance Becomes Repression,” 335–336). His Gospel is primarily about Jesus and his disciples, all ordinary people who are outside the political establishment. Those who are inside the political establishment are, on the other hand, responsible for the suffering and death of Jesus. In numerous episodes (which I will detail in Chapter IV), Mark shows the oppressive ways of those in power; and at least on one occasion, he indicates the excitement of a needy people over the prospect that Jesus may be a new King David (11:7–10). Although Jesus ends up being crucified, Mark promises that Jesus will soon be vindicated by God, who will raise Jesus from the dead, and come in the near future to destroy the present authorities, and bring in a new kingdom.³⁹ How then does an anti-colonial text become part of the arsenal of those who oppress and dominate? In the following chapters, I will argue that the answer must be found by means of the “what-plays” as well as the “who-speaks.”

Rather than “authenticating” oppression, I am trying to emphasize the duplication of oppression.

³⁹ In light of Mark’s content, Tolbert’s categorization of Mark as popular literature (*Sowing the Gospel*, 60–71, 78, 177; see also Joanna Dewey, 472) may be used to further my argument that Mark is written from a colonized, even anti-colonial perspective. Note, however, that this argument about popular literature should only be made *after* a careful survey of Mark’s content, otherwise one runs into the danger of duplicating Fiske’s problem of “essentializing” popular culture as inevitably anti-hegemonic. If popular literature is not necessarily anti-hegemonic, what Deleuze

Summary

James Clifford reminds us that, "Every focus excludes; there is no political innocent methodology" (97). Out of my diasporic (con)text and for the purpose of social change, I find the inter(con)textual understanding a useful point of departure. Literary texts do not stand in isolation; instead, they are always embedded socio-culturally and politically. They have power to constitute subjects, but subjects also have the agency to contour texts. In other words, the formation of our intersubjective identities is a continuous process. As a "culturally produced producer" (Rothstein, 117, 126), what Mark reads, thinks, and writes about has power over us, even though that power does not automatically, immediately, or completely determine our own subject positions.⁴⁰

Subject formation is an area that has largely been unexplored within the so-called "intertextual" studies of the Bible. For example, while Aichele and Phillips mention the word "subjectivity" several times in their orientation to intertextual theories ("Introduction," 7, 9, 10-11), only one of the ensuing essays (Phillips, "What Is Written")

and Félix Guattari call "minor literature" is. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "minor literature" has three characteristics: (1) the deterritorialization of language; (2) a political connection; and (3) an emphasis on collective identity. Mark is written in koine Greek, with a sprinkle of Latinism (for example, 5:9, 15; 15:15; see Waetjen, *Reordering of Power*, 13) as well as some Aramaic (for example, 5:41; 15:34). Mark's story is filled with political dynamics and references to political figures; Jesus, preaching about a new kingdom, is arrested by the Jewish authorities, tried by the high priest and a Roman governor, and finally crucified as the "King of the Jews" (15:26). Despite the fact that Mark's Jesus dies in isolation, there is enough talk about a "new" family that is made up of people who do God's will (3:31-35; 10:28-30) and a future gathering of the elect (13:26-27) to warrant a sense of solidarity, or at least an ideal of community in the Gospel.

⁴⁰ This approach becomes even more relevant to the reading of Mark in light of the ancient understanding of language as a force that affects people's beliefs and actions (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 223-224). Recently, Maud W. Gleason, pursuing the relationship between ancient rhetoric and subject construction, argues that ancient rhetoric was not only the means through which subjects were constructed, but that ancient rhetoricians themselves often embodied what ideal manhood was in that culture. Regarding Mark's subject construction, Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 161-163, 266, 288-299, 302) has insightfully pointed out that while Mark's goal is to persuade his readers/hearers to be faithful followers of Jesus, Mark's rhetoric is ironically deterministic. According to Tolbert, the Gospel presents people as either "insiders" or "outsiders" whose status pre-determines their ability to comprehend Jesus' message (4:10-12); similarly, Mark presents people as ground types whose responses reveal their "nature" (4:1-9, 13-20). Presenting people with an inner and unchanging "nature," Mark may be guilty of suppressing intersubjectivity, or the very process of subject construction in which he is engaging (see Susan Watkins, 53).

in that volume of *Semeia* deals directly with the relationship between subject construction and a biblical text; and whatever that essay has to say about intersubjectivity is, in effect, canceled out by its simultaneous emphasis on deconstructive freeplay.

Regardless of the date of Mark's composition (that is, whether it was written before or after the first Jewish-Roman war), the (con)text of this piece of colonial literature is highly politically-charged, particularly with its mention of a Roman governor, Roman soldiers, and a Jewish "king." How, then, does Mark portray, and construct the colonized people in his Gospel? How may his constructions influence, and form colonial relations? And how should I relate to his subject constructions in light of my (con)text, and my commitment to social and economic justice? These are the questions that I bring with me to the Markan text. In the next chapter, I will look at two important, and interrelated dimensions of Mark; namely its political and apocalyptic dimensions.

CHAPTER THREE

BRIDGING THE GREAT DIVIDE: THE POLITICS OF MARK'S APOCALYPTIC

In ways that parallel the inter(con)textual understanding that “nothing exists in itself” (Holquist, *Dialogism*, 145), literary critics like Brantlinger (*Rule*) and Said (*Culture*) have recently emphasized the significance of reading nineteenth-century C.E. British literature alongside the social text of British imperialism. A similar emphasis on Roman imperialism will also benefit literary criticism of the Gospels by moving it beyond formalism to participate in the socio-political struggle for liberation.¹

While I plan to explore the socio-political dimension of Mark by studying its constructions of colonial subjects, I also (for reasons that will become clear as this chapter progresses) want to relate such a study to the Gospel’s apocalyptic emphasis. By apocalyptic, I mean simply the belief that God will soon intervene in history to erase all evil and demonic powers, and usher in a new age of perfect divine sovereignty.² In Mark, the story of Jesus is opened by a scriptural “quotation” that refers to God’s coming visit (“Prepare now the way over which the Lord will come for a visit,” [Ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδόν

¹ Biblical scholars who are not necessarily concerned with literary theory have also contributed to this awareness. One particular scholar who has strived to set the Gospels within colonial politics with what is commonly known as social criticism is Richard A. Horsley (see, for example, his “Imperial Situation”; “Kingdom”; and “Popular Messianic Movements”). In my opinion, however, Horsley’s studies are hampered by his historicist bent; namely, his interest in the historical Jesus, his depiction of the imperial situation in ancient Palestine as given reality, and his understanding of the Gospels as merely “traces” of that imperial reality. For a brief explanation of social criticism, and a specific example of its application to Markan studies, see David Rhoads.

² Others have defined apocalyptic in more complicated ways. Some do so with a list of characteristics, while others make specific distinctions between terms like “apocalyptic,” “apocalypse,” “apocalyptic eschatology,” and “apocalypticism” (see, for example, the summary in D. S. Russell, 8–13). For our purpose, it is important to remember, in light of the only two unanimously recognized ancient Jewish apocalyptic communities (the Qumran community and the early Christians), that apocalyptic is not limited to any particular genre, but may be found in a variety of literary forms (Schüssler Fiorenza, “Phenomenon,” 295–305).

κυρίου], 1:3b),³ and the first words out of Jesus' mouth concerns the nearness of the kingdom (1:15). Mark also takes great pain to emphasize that Jesus, or the coming kingdom, is about an aggressive assault on Satan. Immediately after Jesus' baptism (and before his first words), he is engaged with Satan in solo combat in an apocalyptic setting of wild beasts and angels (1:12–13); throughout the Gospel, Jesus is exorcising demons (for example, 1:21–28; 5:1–20; 9:14–29), an activity that Mark compares to the plundering of Satan's household (3:23–27). In addition to different allusions to a future kingdom that is powerful and eternal (for example, 9:1; 10:29–30; 14:62), Mark's apocalyptic emphasis is further evidenced by the so-called "Markan apocalypse" (chapter 13, the significance of which is shown by several not-so-subtle addresses given directly to its readers, like 13:14 and 13:37), and the second of the two unusually long parables in the Gospel (12:1–12, which guarantees God's final destruction of evil). Finally, as Tolbert points out (*Sowing the Gospel*, 117–118), even the form of the Gospel communicates a sense of urgency, or a shortness of time with the generous uses of the word "immediately" (εὐθύς), the καὶ-paratactic style, the participles, and the historic present. For Mark, the development of the entire Gospel is informed by an apocalyptic framework.

What surprises me, then, is that in the history of Markan scholarship, scholars who have interpreted Mark socio-politically in the colonial sense tend to downplay its apocalyptic feature. The reverse is also true; studies that focus on Mark's apocalyptic dimension generally do not bother with its potential implications for Jewish-Roman relations. After surveying sample scholarship to illustrate this tendency to segregate the socio-political and apocalyptic dimensions of Mark, I will suggest a conjunction between the two through a specific inter(con)textual relationship: the one between ancient Jewish apocalyptic (from the third century B.C.E. to the second century C.E.),⁴ and colonial politics.

³ All translations of Mark are my own unless indicated otherwise. For a discussion whether "the Lord" (κυρίου) in 1:3b refers to God or Jesus, see Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 239–248.

⁴ I am incorporating Mark into ancient Jewish apocalyptic because the line between Jews and Christians was not solidly drawn until well into the second century C.E.; see, for example, Christopher Rowland.

Mark's Non-Apocalyptic, Colonial Politics

Assuming that Mark was written in Galilee after the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem temple (70 C.E.), Werner H. Kelber's literary reading perceives Mark as a Christian attempt to come to terms with Israel's tragedy. Kelber contends that Mark does so by presenting the disciples as hard heads who fail to understand (1) that the kingdom of God is not tied to a place or a nation, and (2) that the kingdom comes only through suffering and death. Instead, they expect the temple and Jerusalem to be the site for the kingdom to come in power, and without delay. Since the women are too fearful to point them to Galilee at the end of the Gospel, they must have stayed and waited in Jerusalem, only to witness its being sacked, and the temple burned. The good news is, however, precisely that the life of the kingdom is totally unaffected by what happened in Jerusalem. At the same time, Kelber is quick to point out that Mark is not being anti-Jewish; Mark's explanation, he argues, does not necessarily interpret Jerusalem's plight as God's judgment. As Kelber connects the Gospel to colonial relations, he remains very quiet about what Mark has to say about the future coming of Jesus. What Kelber offers in this regard is mere negation: that Jerusalem is not the site, the temple's destruction is not the end, and the time of Jesus' second coming is not to be speculated. In a sense, the parousia seems almost anti-climatic for Kelber, since he believes Jesus' coronation has already happened in the moment of crucifixion.

Turning a Marxist twist on S. G. F. Brandon's *Jesus and the Zealots* (which sees Mark as an attempt to dissociate Jesus from Jewish revolutionary activities around 71 C.E.), Fernando Belo starts with the working assumption that Mark was written in Rome soon after the destruction of Jerusalem. After a detailed depiction of the exploitative imperial situation and the insecurity felt by a repressed Roman church, Belo mixes Marxism, French poststructuralism, and historical-critical biblical criticism to produce his "materialist reading." According to him, Mark's "postpaschal" text (238) does not erase the practices of the historical Jesus, who, as a representative of the lower classes, tore up the Jewish purity system, and rejected a militant nationalism. Instead, Jesus promoted an all-inclusive relationship of reciprocal sharing. With what Belo describes as a "communist," "nonrevolutionary," and "internationalist" strategy (261–262), Jesus forced both the Jewish and Roman ruling classes to resort to murder, and thus

revealed the frailty of their so-called "power."

While Jesus' death and resurrection should raise up followers committed to a liberating economic and political practice, Belo continues to argue, the catastrophe of the first Jewish-Roman war left the Roman church in such a state of powerlessness that Mark began to find refuge in theologizing the ministry of Jesus. Mark does so by (1) emphasizing Jesus' foreknowledge of his death as God's preordained will, and (2) expecting an imminent parousia. For Belo, then, the only positive function Mark's apocalyptic serves is its reflection of a desperate situation that befits the destruction of Jerusalem, and thus its indication of the Gospel's post-70 C.E. date.

Dissatisfied with the way Belo divides the Gospel into "prepaschal" and "postpaschal" layers, Myers uses a "socio-literary" approach (31) that reads Mark as a unified entity. For Myers, the message of Mark is also inseparable from the historical moment in which it was produced. On the basis of Mark's "inaccurate" description of the temple's destruction (it was destroyed by fire rather than by the tearing of stones as Mark's Jesus proclaims in 13:2), Myers argues that the Gospel was written during the Jewish revolt, but before their disastrous defeat in 70 C.E. Myers sees Mark rejecting imperialistic Roman oppression, the collaborationist stance of the ruling class, the reform movement of the Pharisees, the separatist stance of the Essenes, and the triumphalistic rebel cause during this time of intense "war of myths" (14-17). Standing with the marginalized and the oppressed, Mark advocates to end the temple's exploitative economy, and to build instead, a just and egalitarian community of sharing and mutual service. Such a new world order, according to Myers' reading of Mark, is achieved by the way of the cross, which Myers equates with Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent resistance. Rather than reversing the spiral of violence and domination, the cross stops it.

Like Belo, however, Myers also finds it necessary to explain away *all* apocalyptic elements in his "political reading" of Mark. He interprets all the references to the parousia as references to the cross. Instead of a future second coming, the hour of advent has already come at the time of Jesus' death; rather than looking for an imminent and complete establishment of the kingdom, one should understand that the kingdom only comes in slow and patient growth.

Wactjen's "socio-political" reading of Mark (*Reordering of Power*) is quite similar to Myers' "political reading." Informed by sociology, cultural anthropology, and reader-response theory, Wactjen sees Mark

as one who was caught in the pain of Roman colonization and class struggle. Mark's Jesus, then, is a "trailblazer" whose baptism, death, and resurrection recreate a new humanity, and overturn the old order. This old order—which is represented by the temple, and the power of Jewish and Roman establishment—is characterized by binary exclusion, hierarchical oppression, and economic dispossession. Jesus' new order, on the other hand, is typified by egalitarian and familial relationships. There are, however, at least two distinct differences between Waetjen's and Myers' interpretation: (1) Waetjen argues that Mark was written in Syria after the destruction of Jerusalem; and (2) Waetjen perceives the resurrection, which legitimates Jesus as the first new human being and inaugurates the new society, as the key to reorder power relations. There is nevertheless one major concern that Waetjen and Myers share: the dismissal of Mark's apocalyptic emphasis. In addition to identifying Easter as the moment when Mark's Jesus comes in power, Waetjen suggests that Mark is actually at work to discredit Jewish apocalyptic by, for example, using the natural but slow process of agricultural growth to illustrate God's kingdom.

Applying Girard's theory on ritual scapegoating to the Gospel of Mark, Hamerton-Kelly manages to use this basically functionalist theory to implicate the dominant order rather than reinforce the existing social stratification. Hamerton-Kelly does not really locate Mark's production in any specific situation, with the exception of Mark chapter 13, which he takes to be a response to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. His main concern is to argue that Mark, like Paul, presents a gospel that challenges the "sacred," or the violent system that rules the world (for Hamerton-Kelly, that includes for Mark both Jewish and Roman social formation). While Jesus' death on the cross exposes the way the "sacred" is dependent on violence, Jesus' resurrection signifies the possibility of a new community that is characterized by love and inclusiveness. Although Hamerton-Kelly affirms the radical discontinuity between the old order and the new community, he makes no direct effort to interpret what Mark has to say about the actual realization of such a community, or how the transition happens from one into the other. Appealing to Mark's open-ended ending, he simply pushes the issue into an unspecified future as a vague possibility that hinges on human faith. Hamerton-Kelly's resistance of Mark's apocalyptic emphasis can be detected in his references to apocalyptic as a "cliché" (62, 70) and a "melodrama" (91). It is this same resistance that makes it

necessary for him to argue that within Mark, the so-called "Son of Man" (*sic.*) figure (which has long been taken as an apocalyptic symbol) "is presented chiefly in terms of space rather than time" (114).

Mark's Non-Colonial Apocalyptic

Among scholars who emphasize Mark's non-colonial apocalyptic, Perrin, who has done much to pave the way for redaction criticism of the Gospels to develop into literary criticism, is also pivotal in pointing out "the function of apocalyptic language for Mark's interpretation of Jesus" (Howard Clark Kee, *Community*, x). He—and his student, Duling—suggest that Mark is a three-act "apocalyptic drama" in which John the Baptist, Jesus, and Christians take their turns to preach and be delivered up, until the imminent second coming of Jesus brings the drama to a satisfactory end. While Perrin and Duling mention in reference to Mark 13 that the first Jewish-Roman War "led to an upsurge of apocalyptic expectations" (241), their outline of the entire Gospel shows that their understanding of this "apocalyptic drama" is primarily pastoral and christological—with the exception of two passing comments that Perrin's other student, Kelber, picks up and develops, namely how Mark may have managed to live with the destruction of the temple by declaring it "unworthy" before God (251, 254). In the hands of Perrin and Duling, Mark's apocalyptic emphasis becomes nothing more than the Gospel writer's concern to prepare his readers adequately with "a correct understanding of Christology and a true understanding of Christian discipleship" (255).

Referring to Hirsch's "historical horizon" on both the very first and the very last page of his book, Kee's "socio-cultural-historical method" (*Community*, ix) suggests two historical analogies to the Markan community. One is the Cynic-Stoic itinerant charismatics, which Kee compares to the description of the disciples' mission in Mark 6:6b-13. The other, which also happens to be more important in Kee's overall project, is ancient Jewish apocalyptic. Linking Mark's historical understanding (Jesus' eschatological exaltation in 9:2-8 as the Gospel's literary center) and narrative strategy (quasi-biographical retelling of Jesus' story as H. H. Rowley's apocalyptic "historical backdating")⁵ to those of ancient Jewish apocalyptic, Kee proceeds

⁵ According to Rowley (39-53), this strategy serves three main functions for the

to identify Mark as a pre-70 C.E. product of a Syrian apocalyptic community. After distinguishing the Markan community from Roman collaborationists, the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the insurrectionists, Kee only ends up reducing the community to a conventicle “that feels itself alienated from the main body of its *religious* heritage” (*Community*, 106, emphasis mine), and thus the Gospel to a form of Jewish-Christian debate. Whatever the term “religious” may include, it definitely excludes any socio-political implication in the colonial sense. Characterizing the Markan community with the specific heading, “Avoidance of political involvement” (*Community*, 93), Kee gradually eliminates the Romans from the picture, and designates the Jewish religious authorities as the target of Mark’s attacks. The second half of Kee’s book is devoted to studying traditionally “religious” (in Kee’s sense) concepts of the Markan community like “community,” “christology,” “eschatology,” and “ethics.”

Like Kee, Mack understands the Gospel as a Syrian product that addresses Jewish-Christian disagreements. Unlike Kee, Mack dates Mark after 70 C.E., and expands Mark’s “dialogue” to include intra-Christian elements. Drawing on (1) Bultmann’s (*History*) classification of Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity; (2) Kelber’s study; and (3) Vernon Robbins’ idea that Mark functions as an “origin myth” for Christian formation, Mack argues that Mark combines the materials of the Jesus movement and the Christ cult to respond to the destruction of the temple, and the separation of Christians from local synagogues. According to Mack, Mark did so by creating an apocalyptic myth of divine intervention into the world. Within this myth’s prediction/fulfillment script, Jesus (originally a Jewish Cynic) becomes an anti-temple messiah-martyr who, despite being murdered by the Jews, inaugurates a kingdom which God will vindicate at the end. While Mack’s effort to investigate the implication of this Markan myth in the political development of the United States (368–376) should be appreciated, I remain dissatisfied with the way he separates Mark’s apocalyptic from the colonial politics of Mark’s own time. For Mack, the importance of what he calls the “more recent” (166) event, the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem temple, is actually overshadowed by that of the “less recent” (166),

apocalypticist: (1) it offers protection for his or her identity; (2) it portrays a sense of divine purpose in past and present, and thus also future, happenings; and (3) it lends the apocalyptic writer authority.

the failure of the synagogue reform movement. For example, Mack makes two intentional moves to disassociate Mark from Jewish-Roman politics: (1) he adopts the romantic notion that "Jews had succeeded in constructing a theory of a fully self-governing nation state . . . by translating all royal functions . . . into sacerdotal institutions" (28);⁶ and (2) he argues that within Mark's story, the crowd turns against Jesus during the trial because it finally realizes that Jesus' messiahship is anti-temple rather than anti-Roman (282).

Situating the Gospel of Mark within the primarily oral culture of the Greco-Roman world, and comparing it to ancient novels, Tolbert's "literary-historical" reading (*Sowing the Gospel*) identifies two long parables within Mark (that of the sower in 4:3-9, 14-20, and that of the wicked tenants in 12:1-12) as synopses that orient the reader/hearer to its plot development. For Tolbert, Mark presents Jesus as God's last loving attempt to call humanity to repentance and obedience. What Jesus finds, however, are mostly hard, rocky, and thorny hearts that end up murdering the messenger. As a result, God has no choice but to destroy this wicked human world, and start all over again. This promise of an imminent new world, then, is Mark's gospel or good news. Linking the Gospel's apocalyptic with Mark's emphasis on suffering (a canonical feature within the history of Markan scholarship since Theodore J. Weeden overturns the positive function previously ascribed to miracles in relation to Mark's Christology), Tolbert contends that Mark is in no way advocating a masochistic mentality or practice; in Mark's apocalyptic understanding, suffering would never be long. Although Tolbert should be credited for her concern with Mark's ethical implications, and for not quarantining biblical materials within Jewish-Christian or intra-Christian quarters,⁷ her concentration on Hellenistic culture and literary conventions nonetheless brackets out the dimension of colonial politics between Jews and Romans.⁸ The awkwardness of jumping from a deliberation on the first Jewish-Roman war as a possible time frame for Mark's composition to a discussion of Hellenism is obviously not lost on Tolbert, who offers an explanation with the following footnote (37 n. 5):

⁶ In contrast, see Eliezer Paltiel, who challenges this romantic notion of Jewish-Roman relations.

⁷ For Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 303), reducing Mark to such Jewish-Christian and intra-Christian debates reflects a problematic transference of Pauline scholarship.

⁸ For a critique of culturalism that neglects socio-political relations, see Dirlik. Note that Tolbert has moved beyond culturalism since the publication of *Sowing the Gospel*; see, for example, her "When Resistance Becomes Repression."

Some scholars, often focusing primarily on political influence, prefer to end the Hellenistic period with the rise of the Roman Empire in the first century B.C.E. Since our interest is in the dominance of Greek culture that extended into the early centuries of the Roman period, we will date the end of Hellenism to the “triumph of Christianity” in the fourth century C.E.

Perhaps this segregation between the apocalyptic and the politico-colonial emphasis within the history of Markan scholarship is best illustrated in Adela Yarbro Collins’ *The Beginning of the Gospel*. Rejecting the ahistorical tendency of literary formalism, Yarbro Collins’ basically historical-critical study argues that Mark, as “an apocalyptic historical monograph” (27), has positive socio-cosmic implications that go beyond individual piety. This wider implication includes for Yarbro Collins an “embrace [of] the universe as God’s creation with a ‘developmental history’ and a destiny” (38), and “the well-being of each individual and of the whole individual, as well as the manifestation of God’s rule in all creation, including human society” (58). Mark’s apocalyptic emphasis, in other words, is not fanatical and escapist. For example, Yarbro Collins suggests that, in view of Mark’s emphasis on Jesus’ absence rather than presence after the resurrection, and the importance Mark consistently places on witnessing, the Gospel’s apocalyptic carries with it an expectation that the disciples will be faithful in their God-given mission *in* the world—an expectation that, if not met, will result in apocalyptic judgment. What surprises me is that in spite of her rejection of a pre-existing Little Apocalypse and her emphasis of “probing Mark in context” (book’s subtitle), Yarbro Collins’ positive spin on Markan apocalyptic does not have much to say regarding Jewish-Roman relations. Rather than “probing” Mark in its colonial “context,” Yarbro Collins simply brushes the issue aside with the statement that “the overt political interest in Mark is limited” (35)—even though Mark specifically covers every item that she prescribes for a “political” apocalypse (“kings, lesser rulers, kingdoms, battles, and, of course, persecution” [35]). As a result, her interpretation of Mark’s apocalyptic fails to move beyond a vague “tension between justice and wickedness” (35). Such an interpretation on Yarbro Collins’ part is all the more shocking considering how instrumental she has been in pushing the study of ancient Jewish apocalyptic beyond a focus on genre to include an investigation of both its (socio-*political*) setting and function.⁹

⁹ The earlier focus on studying the genre of apocalypse is, in my opinion, best

Apocalyptic as a Product of Colonial Politics

This segregation of Markan apocalyptic from colonial politics may be, as David M. Olster (14–29) suggests in his study of seventh-century C.E. Christian Roman literature, a legacy of Adolf Harnack, who started the modern historical study of Christianity with the modern idea(l) that religion and politics should be kept separate.¹⁰ There is ample evidence to argue, however, that ancient Jewish apocalyptic is, more often than not, associated with colonialism. For one thing, it is generally accepted that ancient Jewish apocalyptic flourished between two dramatic colonial conflicts: the Maccabean revolt (167–164 B.C.E.) and the Bar-Kokhba rebellion (or the second Jewish-Roman war [132–135 C.E.], which resulted in the disastrous Jewish diaspora).

With the word “product,” I intend to make two arguments within this section: (1) that certain basic ideas of ancient Jewish apocalyptic are borrowed from other cultures as a result of colonial encounter; and (2) that specific ancient Jewish apocalyptic were actually written to address colonial developments.

For a long time, scholars have been arguing about the origins of ancient Jewish apocalyptic. While some like to emphasize Jewish sources like prophecy (Paul D. Hanson; Otto Plöger; and Rowley) or wisdom (Gerhard von Rad), others have emphasized its foreign

illustrated by the volume of *Semeia* edited by John J. Collins (*Apocalypse*), who provides a working definition of the genre that covers both form and content. While Collins should be credited for moving apocalyptic studies from a genetic (that is, a concern with delineating sources) to a generic emphasis, the focus on genre can lead to, among other things, a preoccupation with formalism (see, for example, Leitch, 62–82). Following up on the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism in Uppsala, in which various scholars expressed their dissatisfaction with the insufficiency of this narrow generic focus (see David Hellholm), Yarbrow Collins edited her own volume of *Semeia* to include setting and function in studying ancient Jewish apocalyptic (*Early Christian Apocalypticism*). Her volume is so influential that Collins, despite earlier resistance (“Genre Apocalypse”), agrees to supplement his definition of the genre with a reference to function in a later article (“Genre, Ideology and Social Movements”).

¹⁰ In contrast, see, for example, I. M. Lewis, who links religious mysticism with gender politics; and Michel S. Laguerre, who connects Haitian voodoo with colonial politics. Note also that the widely assumed division between religion and politics has made it necessary for those who interpret Mark socio-politically to be more explicit about their underlying assumptions, goals, and interests. For instance, Belo brings up his commitment to Marxism in the very first page (1) of his book; Myers acknowledges that his book comes out of his involvement in activism for peace and justice (xxxi–xxxii); Waetjen relates his to his experiences in the “third world,” particularly Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe (*Reordering of Power*, xiv); and Harnerton-Kelly associates his reading to his concern for peace and arms control (xvi).

roots. Philip R. Davies, for example, cites the history of successive kingdoms in Daniel 7, the esoteric interpretation of ancient books in Daniel 9, and the *vaticinia ex eventu* of political events in Daniel 10-12 to suggest that ancient Jewish apocalyptic draws most of its inspiration from the so-called "Akkadian prophecies" (A. K. Grayson and W. G. Lambert), and thus more generally by implication, from Babylonian "mantic-scribal conventions and interests" (Davies, 264). This Babylonian connection is concurred by Norman Cohn, who associates "the dream-interpreter Daniel and the encyclopedic Enoch" with the "mantic wisdom" and the "cosmological wisdom" of Mesopotamian, or more specifically, Babylonian "wise men" (165-166).

In addition, Cohn also relates ancient Jewish apocalyptic to the "combat myth" of ancient Mesopotamian culture. His book on "the ancient roots of apocalyptic faith" (subtitle), however, proceeds to make a definite distinction between these on-going "combats" to preserve the ordered world against chaos and the promise of a last and lasting victory offered by the Persian or Iranian prophet, Zoroaster (sometime between 1500 and 1200 B.C.E.). For Cohn, Zoroaster is also responsible for three other crucial elements of apocalyptic faith that are foreign to Jewish traditions: (1) the existence of an evil power (Angra Mainyu) who promotes *drug* ("falsehood"), threatens to usurp the divine (Ahura Mazda), and brings about all forms of trouble and imperfection to the world; (2) the existence of a divine plan that will lead, step by step, to that perfect victory, and the beginning of eternal bliss; and (3) the reward of resurrection and immortality to the righteous dead. For instance, the first Jewish reference to the Devil, named Mastema ("hostility" or "animosity"), is found in the Book of Jubilees. In addition to demonic spirits that actively seduce Jews to go astray, we see in 1 Enoch the "periodisation of time into a series of world-ages" (Cohn, 222),¹¹ and the binding and burying of archdemons by archangels before the final judgment.

¹¹ Here Cohn is referring specifically to the part of 1 Enoch generally known as the Apocalypse of Weeks (1 Enoch 91:11-17, 93:1-10), in which history is divided into ten "weeks," or ten periods. This scheme, which also appears in the Sibylline Oracles, provides a sense of destiny, and is most likely "derived from the Persian idea of the millennium" (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 50; see also 24, 192). A different periodisation of history is, of course, also found in Daniel 2, where kingdoms appear successively, each represented by a different metal. Citing similar periodisations by metals in the *Bahman Yasht* and the *Dēnkard*, Collins (*Apocalyptic Imagination*, 74-75) once again locates its root in Persian soil.

While Cohn attributes the dualism (and especially the existence of an evil power) that is often found in ancient Jewish apocalyptic to Persian Zoroastrianism,¹² Mendel (24–30) sees apocalyptic dualism as a result of Hellenistic neo-Platonic, gnostic influence. I am, of course, not interested in excluding ancient Jewish apocalyptic from its Jewish roots, nor am I interested in narrowing its non-Jewish influences to any single source. As many scholars have suggested, ancient Jewish apocalypticists “cast their nets wide” (Cohn, 166; see also Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 16, 26; Davies, 259; and Kee, *Community*, 80). What I want to emphasize is that such “cultural borrowings” on the part of ancient Jewish apocalyptic was actually “facilitated” by “colonial bullying,” since Jews were colonized successively by Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks from 587 B.C.E. With (1) the exile into Babylon, (2) the establishment of Zoroastrianism as the official religion of the Persian Empire,¹³ and (3) the enforcement of Hellenization,¹⁴ Jews must have had ample opportunity to become familiar with various literary and conceptual traditions from their colonizers. Even more significantly, in a move that demonstrates the agency of the colonized, Jews incorporated these traditions from their colonizers into their apocalyptic to protest against colonialism. Let me give a few examples.¹⁵

¹² For Kee (*Community*, 70), Persian dualism, along with its archangels and archdemons, have led to yet another feature of ancient Jewish apocalyptic: intermediary figures through whom God accomplishes God's purposes in the world.

¹³ While Cohn (102) remains a little hesitant on the religious affiliation of the founder of the Persian Empire, Cyrus the Great, Cohn is confident of the embrace of Zoroastrianism on the part of Cyrus' successors on the basis of tombstone inscriptions. For Jewish exposure to Zoroastrian influence during and after Persian colonization, see Cohn, 79, 223–225.

¹⁴ Although Peter Green may be criticized for using the model of an “invaded colony” (more specifically, the British colonization of India in the nineteenth century C.E.) to study the Greek colonization of Palestine and Syria in the fourth century B.C.E. (a phenomenon that is closer to the model of a “settler colony”), his thesis that “Hellenization” is associated with colonial exploitation is nevertheless important and valid. For a discussion of “invaded colonies” and “settler colonies,” see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, 24–27.

¹⁵ Since Mark was written under Roman colonization, I will focus on examples from the Greco-Roman period. Cohn (146–163), however, has argued that although Jewish apocalypses proper were not produced until the third or second century B.C.E. (or, around the time of the Maccabees), the exile into Babylon had already brought about the adoption of certain apocalyptic elements in post-exilic Jewish writings like Ezekiel, deutero-Isaiah, Zechariah, and Joel. For Cohn, these “traces” include: the emphasis of Yahweh as the only true God who created the world and controls history, the prediction of a victorious and glorious future through the direct intervention of Yahweh, and the climination or extermination of everything and

Daniel is the first Jewish apocalypse and the last book admitted into the canon of the Hebrew Bible. Although the story is set in the (con)text of the Babylonian exile, its *vaticinia ex eventu* of political events (Daniel 10–12) has led to the general consensus that Daniel was written during the turbulent times of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolt (160s B.C.E.). Presenting history in a succession of kingdoms (Daniel 2 and 7), connecting the succession of such kingdoms to battles between supernatural powers (Daniel 7, 10–11), and promising a future resurrection (Daniel 12), Daniel incorporates non-Jewish literary and conceptual features to affirm Yahweh's control of the world, ascertain the eventual destruction of Gentile kingdoms, and give support to those who tried to remain faithful to Yahweh in face of persecution and the threat of martyrdom. Depicting the Hellenistic kingdom as weakening gradually and internally (the iron legs become mixed with clay at the feet) as early as Daniel 2, Daniel's guarantee of a final and everlasting Jewish kingdom in Daniel 7 simply brings his "vision" to its logical conclusion.

If Daniel seems silent or somewhat unenthusiastic about the Maccabees, the section within 1 Enoch known as the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 85–90) seems to be endorsing the Maccabees as the "ram" that will battle bestial empires with angelic help (1 Enoch 90) until God renews all things with the mighty sword. As the depiction of Israel as a sheep among beasts shows, 1 Enoch is rather "ethnocentric." Imitating the Mesopotamian writings that center on a national hero, 1 Enoch actually participates in the "competitive historiography" (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 35) that vies for cultural supremacy. For instance, as the authors demonstrate an encyclopedic knowledge that equals any Babylonian or Hellenistic "wise man" (for example, the so-called "Astronomical Book" in 1 Enoch 72–82),

everyone that may impair or oppose Yahweh's world order (see also R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, 36–38). In fact, Cohn seems to go even further to attribute the very root ideas of ancient Jewish apocalyptic to the threat of colonial relations. For example, he (4–5, 16–18, 32–53, 140) repeatedly relates the development of the combat myth in ancient Mesopotamian cultures to the wars against foreign "highlanders" that include the Gutians, the Elamites, the Kassites, and the Persians. Likewise, he (93–96, 114–115) deemphasizes the idea that Zoroaster's "revolutionary" world-view was a result of his early personal experience as a poor, defenseless person; instead, he sees it as both a reflection of, and a response to, the conflicts caused by outside warrior tribes who threatened to invade, and change the accustomed way of life from "cattle-rearing" to "cattle-raiding." Note also that my discussion of various examples in the following paragraphs is highly indebted to Cohn; Collins (*Apocalyptic Imagination*); and Russell.

they also reveal their superior knowledge of a divine plan, and how such a plan is being fulfilled. Jewish law and the Jewish calendar are also presented as ordinances of God for all people, whose observance of such “universals” will become a basis of the final judgment (for example, 1 Enoch 1–5, 72, 82). Such an apparent “ethnocentrism” takes on a different meaning—even an anti-colonial insinuation—when 1 Enoch is inter(con)textualized alongside the Hellenization and colonization between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.

This relationship between ancient Jewish apocalyptic and (anti-) colonial politics is perhaps even clearer in the Jewish Sibylline Oracles. Adopting the tradition of the non-Jewish “prophetess,” these oracles, like other ancient Mediterranean oracles that “foretell,” and “forthtell,” against Greek colonialism (for example, the Dynastic Prophecy from Babylon; and the Demotic Chronicle and the Potter’s Oracle from Egypt), are specifically concerned with “the struggle for kingship and sovereignty” (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 95) since the beginning of history. In addition to warning the Greeks directly not to mess with the temple nor the city of Jerusalem (Sib. Or. 3:545–572, 732–735), the third Oracle also “fantasizes” about a future judgment of all Gentile kings and an utopian Jewish state (Sib. Or. 3:657–658, 702–731). Similarly, dividing history into ten generations under four kingdoms, each of diminishing power (Sib. Or. 4:49–101), the fourth Oracle (Sib. Or. 4:173–192) practically presents the Hellenistic kingdom as “the nadir of history” (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 193) facing imminent judgment.

The (anti-)colonial (con)text of ancient Jewish apocalyptic continued as the colonial power over the ancient Mediterranean changed hands from the Greeks to the Romans. The fifth Sibylline Oracle, for example, uses the code name, “Babylon,” to condemn Rome for immorality (Sib. Or. 5:162–178, 386–393), arrogance (Sib. Or. 5:34, 140), and destroying the temple (Sib. Or. 5:155–161, 398–413). Because of such evil, God will send a “king” (Sib. Or. 5:108–109), or a “star” (Sib. Or. 5:111–178) to restore Jerusalem, to return wealth to the worthy, and to raze the earth with fire (Sib. Or. 5:158–159, 179–434). Likewise, 3 Baruch, which provides an “apocalyptic cure” (J. C. Picard) to the catastrophe of 70 C.E. by a revelation of God’s glory in heaven, nonetheless contains references about the worthlessness and the future punishment of the “Babylonians.” The other two apocalyptic responses to that same national tragedy also have

specific visions of Roman destruction (2 Baruch 36:1–46:7; 4 Ezra 10:60–12:39). Besides, there is the War Scroll of the Qumran community which repeatedly equates the Romans (this time through the code name for power, Kittim) with the army of Beliar (1QM 11:8; 13:2; 15:1; and 18:3), and predicts its eventual defeat by the God of Israel (1QM 19:2–9). In addition, there is, of course, the Jewish-Christian apocalypse known as Revelation, in which the Roman Empire is depicted as the “anti-christ,” or the embodiment of evil.

Apocalyptic as a Production of Colonial Politics

Parallel to the term “product” in the previous heading, the word “production” in the present heading is also used to emphasize a couple of concepts. First, it should be clear from the samples provided above that stories of ancient Jewish apocalyptic are “imaginative constructions” (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 91–92) rather than mechanical reflections of “history.” While such constructions are not isolated from socio-political dynamics, they are ultimately not factual information but matters of fantasy and desire. Markan scholars, for example, have argued persuasively that the monolithic presentations of both the Jewish leaders (as a unified front against Jesus) and the disciples (as like-minded dimwits) are literary and ideological devices rather than accurate reporting of historical facts (see, for example, William Wrede; Michael J. Cook; and Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 139, 143, 219).

Second, I do not mean by the word “production” that ancient Jewish apocalyptic caused colonialism (and thus end up blaming the victims), but that, as Leonard Thompson suggests,¹⁶ the relationship between them is a complex “two-way street” rather than a simple “one-directional influence.”¹⁷ In other words, ancient Jewish apocalyptic loops back to affect the colonial politics that produces it. As

¹⁶ I am indebted to Daniel Patte for pointing out the significance of Thompson’s article for my inter(con)textual approach.

¹⁷ Spivak (*Post-Colonial Critic*, 122–123) uses the term “metalepsis” to talk about our tendency to substitute cause for effect, and effect for cause. For Spivak, a one-directional view of cause and effect is often too simplistic to do justice to such a complex relationship. In contrast to those who complain that Said’s presentation of the relationship between “discursive Orientalism” and “practical imperialism” in *Orientalism* is unclear and contradictory, I think Said should be credited for grappling with the circular dynamics involved in the relationship (see Moore-Gilbert, 40–44).

I have mentioned in reference to postmodern sensibilities (and more specifically, in connection with the theory of inter[con]textuality), language, as a symbolic practice, is an active force. This is why Augustus (27 B.C.E.–14 C.E.) decided to destroy or edit certain Sibylline Oracles (see Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 94); and, whether factually accurate or not, Flavius Josephus saw a relationship between the first Jewish-Roman war and “an ambiguous oracle, (likewise) found in their sacred scripture, to the effect that one from their country would become ruler of the world” (*The Jewish War*, Book 6, chap. 5, para. 4). Recent studies, like Michel de Certeau’s delineation of storytelling’s subversive potential and Aparna Dharwadkar’s work on “historical fictions” that challenge “official history,”¹⁸ also suggest that we may study stories of ancient Jewish apocalyptic in terms of their significance as socio-political, or (anti-)colonial rhetoric rather than as a reliable spring board from which to reconstruct the “historical context.”¹⁹ For example, the way Daniel 7 presents the colonizers of Jews as monstrous and chaotic forces of terror, or the so-called “Book of Watchers” (1 Enoch 1–36) paints a world defiled by lawlessness and violence, *may* very well influence the way readers perceive their colonizers, and their present situation. If ancient Jewish apocalyptic

¹⁸ There is, by now, a vast amount of literature on the power of narrative. Examples include: feminist studies on romance novels (for example, Linda K. Christian-Smith; and Janice Radway), theories on literature of minorities and traditionally oral cultures (for example, A. Hampate Ba; and Valerie Smith), and Critical Legal Studies (for example, Drusilla Cornell; and Robert Cover); see also Clayton, *Pleasures*, 58, 91–98, 187. As Maxine Hong Kingston shows regarding the power of her mother “talking-story” (*Woman Warrior*, 23–24), what Lorde says about poetry is also applicable to the writing and telling of stories; Lorde writes (“Poetry,” 37–38):

Right now, I could name at least ten ideas I would have found intolerable or incomprehensible and frightening, except as they came after dreams and poems. This is not idle fantasy. . . . We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and transpose them into a language so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architect of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before.

¹⁹ My emphasis is generally, but not entirely consistent with the trend in the last fifteen years of scholarship on ancient Jewish apocalyptic. While I start by arguing for an existing relationship between apocalyptic and colonial politics, and then proceed to look at the socio-political effects of specific apocalyptic rhetoric, most scholars who move apocalyptic studies to focus on function still (probably as a result of their training in historical-critical criticism) want to identify the primary addressees of an apocalyptic text through an analysis of its function, so as to accomplish the ultimate goal of “historical reconstruction” (see, for example, George W. E. Nickelsburg; Schüssler Fiorenza, “Followers”; and Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis*).

is, to adapt Louis A. Montrose's phrases, "soci[o-politic]ally produced," it is also "soci[o-politic]ally productive" (23). Concentrating on Mark's constructions of colonial subjects, I am in effect giving special significance to rhetoric as "[political] practices that shape actors' consciousness and their resulting intentions, interests, and activities" (Anna Szemere, 625).

Of course, ancient Jewish apocalyptic is not inherently anti-colonial (for example, Sib. Or. 11–14 are pro-Roman), and the politics of actual texts must be examined individually.²⁰ Those that do have an anti-colonial politics, however, suggest that colonized people are not passive victims, but active negotiators.²¹ Without denying the unequal and unjust power relations entailed in colonialism, these ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings show that domination is "never either

²⁰ Once again, difference and practice must not be ignored. This point is well illustrated by Cohn's presentation of Zoroastrianism, which he sees as the root of ancient Jewish apocalyptic. While Cohn suggests that Zoroastrianism is originally a protest against the power of raiding warrior tribes, he is also quick to point out that Zoroastrianism can also be used to serve the interests of the established power (114–115). For example, shortly after Zoroastrianism became the imperial religion of the Persian Empire, the end of the world was conveniently pushed away and into a remote future (Cohn, 102–103). Following that train of thought, there are two important questions that should be considered, but are beyond the scope of this project; they are (1) "How do ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings change and develop in time?" and (2) "How do ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings differ from other non-Jewish apocalyptic writings of the ancient Mediterranean?"

²¹ In light of the understanding regarding language in colonial/postcolonial theories (see, for example, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 7–8), the language of Mark and the entire New Testament, koine Greek, may be seen as a language of resisting colonial subjects who refused the orthodox, classical Greek language as well as the Latin language of their colonizers. Regarding the socio-political function of ancient Jewish apocalyptic, there is actually, like within the contemporary studies of romance, a rather ambivalent or double-edged attitude that it can be negatively escapist (that is, the extraordinary representation of the ideal provides a temporary refuge that makes the less-than-ideal daily existence tolerable, but also ends up tolerating such imperfections) as well as positively empowering (that is, the extraordinary representation of the ideal opens up possibilities of changing the established order). While this ambivalence may highlight the complex and precarious nature of power relations (that is, resistance is constantly present but is also simultaneously vulnerable to the cooption of existing power), others, wanting to emphasize the agency of ordinary people, prefer to see both "anodyne" and "aspiration" (Eagleton, *Ideology*, 184) as necessary moments of the same liberational process. Grossberg, for example, has argued that "empowerment" should not be limited to resistance or emancipation, but should also include "living, even momentarily, within alternative practices, structures, and spaces, even though they may take no notice of their relationship to existing systems of power" (170). Grossberg's position can be further clarified by Roberto Mangabeira Unger (232), who presents the "anodyne" as a source of "aspiration" by making the ideal "graspable," and thus the problems of the established order more unbearable.

total or exclusive" (R. Williams, *Marxism*, 113). Through the power of their writing and imagination, colonized people did, and do have a hand in addressing and shaping colonial relations.

Summary

While ancient Jewish apocalyptic is not necessarily anti-colonial, it should not be studied in separation from "the stresses and tensions of an acculturative situation" (Werblowsky, 38) caused by generations of colonial domination. As they were uprooted and colonized, Jews transplanted various literary and conceptual traditions of their colonizers into their own soil. The flourishing of ancient Jewish apocalyptic in late Hellenistic and early Roman periods is a testimony of both the agency of the Jewish people, and the inter(con)textual relationship between ancient Jewish apocalyptic and colonial politics.²²

This specific inter(con)textual relationship suggests to me that a bridge could be, and should be built over the existing "great divide" between the political and apocalyptic dimensions of Markan scholarship. If scholars who emphasize Mark's apocalyptic dimension have failed to look beyond intra-Christian debates (Perrin and Duling), Judeo-Christian debates (Kee, *Community*; and Mack), or Mark's cultural (con)text (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*), those who highlight Mark's political dimension (Kelber; Belo; Myers; Waetjen [*Reordering of Power*]; and Hamerton-Kelly) have dismissed the Gospel's apocalyptic a little too prematurely. Instead, the grammatical ambiguity of this chapter's subtitle ("The Politics of Mark's Apocalyptic") is to indicate that Mark's apocalyptic is politically influenced as well as politically influential. In the next three chapters, I will proceed to look at Mark's constructions of colonial subjects in relation to its development of apocalyptic.

²² It is significant to note that according to Olster, apocalyptic, which had been dormant during several triumphal centuries of the Christian Roman Empire, experienced a "renaissance" in the seventh century C.E. as the Roman Empire itself faced defeat at the hands of the Arabs and Persians. For similar arguments concerning apocalyptic and colonial politics in a time period closer to our own, see Vittorio Lanternari; and Bryan R. Wilson.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUBJECTS OF AUTHORITY: BETWEEN ROMAN RULE AND MESSIANIC REIGN

My exploration of Mark's constructions of colonial subjects begins with an issue that is particularly pertinent to my inter(con)textual perspective that emphasizes both Jewish-Roman relations and Mark's apocalyptic framework: the question of authority. How may Mark influence a reader's attitudes toward (colonial) authority by the way the Gospel presents and handles authority?

Before I proceed, however, I would like to reiterate five caveats that I have laid out in the previous chapters. Although I have consulted studies of historians and classicists as part of my preparation for this project, my analysis of Mark in the next three chapters is primarily rhetorical. Rather than evaluating the historical factuality of Mark's account, I intend to examine how Mark constructs colonial subjects.¹ Second, my analysis does not assume an universal understanding of human subjectivity; it assumes instead that human subjectivities or subject positions are produced and learned socially and culturally. Whatever Mark has to say about authority, agency, and gender then, may be limited by Mark's specific historical moment, and may represent only one of many possible constructions. Third, my goal to move Gospel studies beyond formalism does not preclude attentive textual analysis *per se*. My problem with so-called "close reading" lies in its being the first and final stage of our critical endeavors. Instead, I think formalist analysis should be both preceded and followed by ideological and socio-political critique. Fourth, since "the preparation of the critic takes place . . . before the confrontation with the text just as much as with it" (Spivak, *Post-Colonial Critic*, 52), my analysis of Mark's constructions of colonial subjects is precisely that: *mine*, one out of a multitude of possible analyses. Finally, the admission that my reading of Mark is "simultaneously an attentive

¹ An important preliminary issue regarding Mark and subject formation has to do with education, literacy, and accessibility of books in the Greco-Roman world. For a helpful discussion of these questions, see Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 35–79.

recovery and an active construction" (S. C. Wong, 128) does not mean that I will not make any inference about meaning and intention, it only means that my hints of Mark's intention are not, in Keller's words, "claims of a biographically documented nature" (242 n. 12).

Attacking Jewish Authorities

Passages on Authority

The question of authority is conspicuous for the number of times it is specifically mentioned by Mark, and for the scenarios in which it is mentioned. The word "authority" (ἐξουσία) is highlighted in the first healing miracle (1:21–28), and the first controversy story (2:1–12) of the Gospel; and both times, Jesus' authority is pitted against that of the scribes. In the first healing story, Mark establishes the hollowness of Jewish scribal authority even before any scribe physically comes into the picture; and he does so in a way that is at once both subtle and matter-of-fact. It is subtle, because while Mark seems to be concentrating on establishing the authoritative teaching of Jesus ("because he [Jesus] was teaching them [people in the synagogue] as one who had authority" [ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοὺς ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων], 1:22b), he undercuts the authority of the scribes in the same breath, and with a minimum of words ("and not like the scribes" [καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς], 1:22c). It is matter-of-fact, because 1:22 is not an observation given by a character within Mark's story-world, but a report given by Mark's omnipresent, omniscient, and seemingly objective narrator. Although 1:21–28 is undeniably a healing story, its conclusion (1:27–28) reminds us of its introduction (1:21–22), and confirms that the healing serves to validate Jesus' authority (which is new and substantial) over and above that of the scribes (which is traditional and hollow). This time, the narrator's report resonates with the people's voice: "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they listen to him" (Τί ἐστὶν τοῦτο; διδασχὴ καινὴ κατ' ἐξουσίαν· καὶ τοῖς πνεύμασι τοῖς ἀκαθάρτοις ἐπιτάσσει, καὶ ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ. 1:27b).

While this comparison of authority occurs only in the minds of the people in the first healing story, it escalates into open conflict with the presence of "several scribes" (τινες τῶν γραμματέων, 2:6a) in the first controversy story (2:1–12). The controversy, as a result of

Jesus pronouncing forgiveness of the paralytic rather than “merely” curing his paralysis, centers on the “authority . . . to forgive sins” (ἐξουσίαν . . . ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας, 2:10).² Although the protest of the scribes seems to concern human usurpation of a divine authority (2:6–7), Mark has placed enough hints in the preceding narrative to bring into question their noble-sounding “concern.” First of all, we have already met a human dispenser of divine forgiveness in the beginning of the Gospel: John the Baptizer, whose rite of baptism is met with a phenomenally positive response (1:4–5). If “*all* the country of Judaea, and *all* the people of Jerusalem” (πάσα ἡ Ἰουδαία χώρα καὶ οἱ Ἱεροσολυμίται πάντες, 1:5a; emphasis mine) have previously flocked to John’s baptism (that is, to his call to repentance, and his promise of forgiveness), what troubles the scribes now must have more to do with who is pronouncing the forgiveness of sins than the actual pronouncement. Following the unfavorable comparison that people made regarding the authority of the scribes *vis-à-vis* the authority of Jesus in the first healing story, the scribal protest begins to sound more like sour grapes. Later, Mark will explicitly identify “jealousy” (διὰ φθόνον, 15:10) as the reason the Jewish authorities seek to murder Jesus.

Since Mark has also affirmed Jesus’ status as God’s “beloved Son” (ὁ υἱός . . . ὁ ἀγαπητός, 1:11) in Jesus’ baptism (1:9–11), the charge of “blasphemy” (βλασφημεῖ, 2:7) that the scribes place on Jesus takes an ironic turn to fall upon their own heads. Together, these two stories portray the scribes as unreliable mediators of divine wisdom, divine forgiveness, and, most of all, divine power. Mark does not let us think, however, that the scribes are the only opponents to Jesus’ ministry, nor the only bad component of the Jewish leadership. In the four other controversy stories that immediately follow, we see Jesus’ challengers expand to include “the scribes who were Pharisees” (οἱ γραμματεῖς τῶν Φαρισαίων, 2:16), people who compare the practices of Jesus’ disciples and the Pharisees (2:18–22), “the Pharisees” (2:24), and “the Pharisees . . . with the Herodians” (οἱ Φαρισαῖοι . . . μετὰ τῶν Ἡρῳδιανῶν, 3:6).³ By the end of the fifth controversy story

² Note that in addition to sharing specific uses of the word “authority” (ἐξουσία, 1:22, 27; 2:10), the first healing story and the first controversy story in Mark also share the same location (Capernaum, 1:21; 2:1), and the same conclusion: Jesus’ healing validates his authority (first as a teacher, and then as a mediator of God’s forgiveness), and causes people to utter (their) amazement (1:27; 2:12b).

³ As I have mentioned briefly in the last chapter, Mark is not concerned with

(3:1-6), Mark's representation of Jewish authorities has escalated from one of weakness to wickedness. Not only are they plotting to kill Jesus (συμβούλιον ἐδίδουν κατ' αὐτοῦ ὅπως αὐτὸν ἀπολέσωσιν, 3:6b), their deliberate plan to murder happens on the Sabbath, "immediately" (εὐθὺς, 3:6a) after Jesus poignantly asks them if one ought "to do good or to do bad, to save life or to kill on the Sabbath" ("Ἐξεστὶν τοῖς σάββασιν ἀγαθὸν ποιῆσαι ἢ κακοποιῆσαι, ψυχὴν σῶσαι ἢ ἀποκτείνειν, 3:4a; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 134-135).⁴

The word "authority" (ἐξουσία and ἐξουσίαν) is highlighted again in 11:27-33, in which the Jewish authorities—this time specifically represented by "the chief priests and the scribes and the elders" (οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι, 11:27), and the place is Jerusalem instead of Capernaum—question the origin of Jesus' authority. Instead of answering their question directly, Jesus poses a counter-question regarding the origin of John the Baptizer's authority, and offers them a choice of two possible solutions: one attributes John's baptism to heaven, the other to humanity. While the divine origin of Jesus' authority is, as we mentioned, already made clear in his baptism (1:9-11), the Jewish leaders' refusal to answer Jesus' counter-question also clarifies that their authority is dependent on human beings, as 11:32b explains that they do not dare answer because "they were afraid of the crowd" (ἐφοβοῦντο τὸν ὄχλον).

being historically accurate in his re-presentation of these Jewish factions. Mark is also not particularly concerned with keeping these factions straight and separate in his narrative. His concern is to present a Jewish leadership that is united in its effort to oppose Jesus. Four examples will suffice to make this argument. First, a series of controversies like the one that marks Jesus' appearance in the synagogues of Galilee (2:1-3:6) is also found surrounding his entry into the temple of Jerusalem (11:27-12:37; see Mack, 206-207); second, the very first charge of blasphemy that the scribes in Galilee make against Jesus (2:6-7) is also the very last charge that the high priest of Jerusalem makes to condemn Jesus to death (14:63-64; see Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 139-140); third, as Demetrios Trakatellis (20) points out, Mark uses the same verb, "accuse" (κατηγορίσωσιν, 3:2b), for what the Pharisees try to do to Jesus in a Galilean synagogue, and what the chief priests try to do to Jesus in Jerusalem (κατηγοροῦν, 15:3; κατηγοροῦσιν, 15:4c); and fourth, in the passion narrative, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders basically appear and function as one group (11:27; 14:43; 15:1; see also Trakatellis, 52). In Mark's Gospel, no particularity that these Jewish factions may have is allowed to disrupt their common desire to destroy Jesus. As a result, these different factions within Jewish leadership become, in effect, interchangeable.

⁴ Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 139) further calls attention to the contrasting responses between the first (2:1-12) and this, the last story of this particular Markan cycle of controversies (2:1-3:6). While the crowd responds in awe, the Jewish leaders of this story respond with a plan to kill.

This idea that the authority of these Jewish leaders has a human origin, and thus has to cater to the moods and opinions of the crowd, can be found in Mark repeatedly. For example, Mark uses similar words to explain why they have to search for an “acceptable,” even “deceitful” (ἐν δόλῳ, 14:1) way to arrest and kill Jesus: “for they were afraid of him [Jesus], because the entire crowd was amazed by his teaching” (ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ αὐτόν, πᾶς γὰρ ὁ ὄχλος ἐξεπλήσσετο ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκῇ αὐτοῦ, 11:18b); and “for they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be a riot among the people’” (ἔλεγον γάρ, Μὴ ἐν τῇ ἑορτῇ, μήποτε ἔσται θόρυβος τοῦ λαοῦ, 14:2). The word “feast” also reminds me of another festivity meal, in which Herod, though being “king” (ὁ βασιλεὺς, 6:14, 26, 27), has to put aside his better judgment, grant his daughter’s request, and have John the Baptizer beheaded “because of his oaths and his guests” (διὰ τοὺς ὅρκους καὶ τοὺς ἀνακειμένους, 6:26).⁵ The way some Pharisees and Herodians flatter Jesus before they present him the trick question regarding paying taxes to Caesar (“Teacher, we know that you are honest, and do not defer to any human being, for you do not look to people’s reactions, but teach the way of God on the basis of truth” [Διδάσκαλε, οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀληθὴς εἶ καὶ οὐ μέλει σοι περὶ οὐδενός, οὐ γὰρ βλέπεις εἰς πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλ’ ἐπ’ ἀληθείας τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ θεοῦ διδάσκεις], 12:14b) serves ironically to implicate their own need to gauge people’s responses as well as “their hypocrisy” (αὐτῶν τὴν ὑπόκρισιν, 12:15), and deepens the contrast between Jesus’ practice and that of the Jewish authorities, both in terms of origin and orientation.

This controversy regarding the origin of Jesus’ authority does not, however, end at 11:33. Linked by a simple transition “and” (καὶ, 12:1), this controversy continues in 12:1–12, or what is traditionally known as the parable of the wicked tenants. If the first half (11:27–33) betrays the human origin, and thus the weakness of the Jewish authorities, its second half, as the traditional heading suggests, focuses on their wickedness; for it reveals not only Jesus’ special status as the heir of the vineyard (despite his statement in 11:33 that he would

⁵ As Hamerton-Kelly puts it, Herod “is the least free and the least powerful of the characters in the story” (97). Although Herod, or Herodius, is presented as the culprit for the Baptizer’s arrest and death (6:14–28), the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders are all implicated by their refusal to believe the Baptizer in 11:31. Again, this “association by guilt” shows that Mark is only interested in presenting, and condemning, Jewish leadership as a united front that opposes God’s purposes in the world.

not reveal to his challengers the basis of his authority) or God's son, it also discloses the Jewish authorities as usurpers and murderers.⁶ As a result, Jesus promises in the parable that God will do three things: God will "come" (ἐλεύσεται, 13:9), God will "destroy" (ἀπολέσει, 12:9) the Jewish authorities, and God will transfer their positions of leadership to others. Although the parable is so explicit that the Jewish authorities realize its sting, they simply walk away from Jesus, because, Mark tells us yet once more, "they were afraid of the crowd" (ἐφοβήθησαν ὃν ὄχλον, 12:12b).

Several elements connect this latter segment on authority (11:27–12:12) with the earlier one (1:21–28; 2:1–12). In addition to the specific appearances of the word "authority," both present the Jewish authorities in an increasingly negative light (from being weak to being wicked). While the scribes suspect Jesus of usurping the divine authority to forgive sins in 2:6–7, Jesus charges the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of usurping the vineyard of God in 12:1–12. Likewise, Mark has "a person with an unclean spirit" (ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ, 1:23) asking Jesus if Jesus has come to destroy (ἀπολέσαι, 1:24) them in the earlier segment, and then has Jesus promise in the parable of the wicked tenants that God will come, and destroy (ἀπολέσει, 12:9) the Jewish authorities. Finally, both controversy stories that mention "authority" specifically are themselves immediately followed by a series of four more controversies, in which issues are debated by Jesus and the Jewish authorities (2:13–3:6; 12:13–12:44).

As much as these two units portray an increasingly critical picture of the Jewish authorities individually, they also produce the same effect collectively. In the first series, Mark has the Jewish authorities questioning Jesus as they witness his actions in various situations. Granted that they do seem rigid, argumentative, and even accusatory in the process, their questions also seem to arise out of a genuine sense of incomprehension and curiosity. In the second series of controversies, the naturalness of a situational interaction is completely gone (see Robert Tannehill). Instead, Mark has them intentionally

⁶ There are altogether five references to the desire to kill Jesus on the part of the Jewish leaders (3:6; 11:18; 12:12; 14:1; 14:55). While four of these references appear after Mark 11, these repeated references nevertheless signify that their killing of Jesus is of a premeditated nature. Such persistence on the part of the Jewish leaders is also borne out by Mark's specific choice of expressions like "they held counsel" (συμβούλιον ἐδίδουν, 3:6) and "they sought" (ζητέω, 11:18; 12:12; 14:1; 14:55).

“sending” (ἀποστέλλουσιν, 12:13a) representatives to present Jesus with a question designed “to catch him in his answer” (ἵνα αὐτὸν ἀγρεύσωσιν λόγῳ, 12:13c). In a similarly calculated manner, some Sadducees make up a hypothetical case to see if Jesus can validate his teaching concerning the resurrection (12:18–26). While Mark has Jesus winning an overwhelming victory in both series of controversy stories, this increasing deliberateness and hostility shown on the part of the Jewish authorities in the second series further implicate them as schemers of evil.⁷

Three Trips Into the Temple

Aside from my argument regarding the relationship between these two segments, the word “again” (πάλιν, 11:27) in the beginning of the second segment on authority reminds us that it has a more immediate connection; it is the third part of a three-day cycle in which Jesus travels in and out of Jerusalem’s temple from Bethany daily. Since both the first and the second day-trips are marked by specific references to Jesus’ coming and going between Jerusalem and Bethany (11:1, 11, 12, 15, 19), one may reasonably expect the same with the third day-trip. While the beginning of this third trip is clearly marked (11:20, 27), no reference to Jesus’ departure from the temple is found until 13:1, where Jesus and the disciples start a conversation concerning the future destruction of the temple. This conversation continues, of course, into what is known as the “apocalyptic discourse,” which Jesus delivers on the Mount of Olives (13:3). Since (1) the Mount of Olives is also mentioned in the beginning of the first day-trip as in close proximity to Bethany (11:1), and (2) the “apocalyptic discourse,” like the accounts of the second and third day-trips (11:12–14; 11:20–25), also contains a reference to the fig tree (13:28–31), I would like to take 11:1–13:37 as a unit, with the third day-

⁷ This shift actually takes place, of course, as the first cycle of debates comes to a close. After the report that the Jewish leaders are plotting to kill Jesus (3:6), Mark begins to imply initiative and purpose in the actions of the Jewish leaders with specific verbs like “coming down” (καταβάντες, 3:22), or “coming” (ἐλθόντες, 7:1). By 8:11, we read that the Pharisees simply “came and began to argue with him [Jesus], seeking from him a sign from heaven, with the purpose to test him” (καὶ ἐξῆλθον οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ ἤρξαντο συζητεῖν αὐτῷ, ζητοῦντες παρ’ αὐτοῦ σημεῖον ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, πειράζοντες αὐτόν). Exactly the same words (“with the purpose to test him” [πειράζοντες αὐτόν], 10:2) are used to describe the purpose behind the Pharisee’s question concerning divorce.

trip spanning from 11:20–13:27. What we find within these three day-trips, then, are some of Mark's most direct and harsh attacks on the Jewish authorities.

Although the first day-trip (11:1–11) seems "conflict-free," the episode nonetheless conveys a sense of un-ease by the way it changes the mood of the day, and the way it suspends anticipated confrontation. This first day begins with Jesus demonstrating his supernatural ability to foretell events (11:1–6), and climaxes with a stirring account of how people usher Jesus into Jerusalem as the one who comes to reestablish the Davidic kingdom in God's name (11:7–10). As Jesus enters the temple, the center of power in Jerusalem, everything comes to a sudden halt in one short verse (11:11). While one may, on the basis of Jesus' previous receptions in the synagogues (1:21–28; 3:1–6), expect the "fan-fare" to end in the temple, one also fails to find the anticipated challenge from the Jewish leaders. This lack of activity seems even more ominous because Jesus looks poised for action. Unlike the previous encounters in which Jesus tends to respond to what the Jewish authorities are thinking, saying or planning, Jesus is the sole subject of 11:11: he went into (εἰσῆλθεν) the temple, he got done looking around (περιβλεψάμενος), and he went out (ἐξῆλθεν). In fact, Mark gives a specific reason why Jesus' observation within the temple is unaccompanied by any action: "because the hour was already late" (ὥρᾳ ἥδη οὕσης τῆς ὥρας, 11:11c).⁸

The conflict that one expects but does not materialize in day one explodes on Jesus' second day-trip into Jerusalem (11:12–19). Having seen enough of what goes on in the temple the day before ("when he got done looking around at everything" [καὶ περιβλεψάμενος πάντα], 11:11b), Jesus becomes the aggressor; he "cleanses" the temple,⁹ and

⁸ According to Perrin and Duling (251), the way Jesus enters Jerusalem (riding on a colt) may already carry a negative representation of the Jewish authorities. They base that idea on a traditional exegesis within the Babylonian Talmud, which claims that the Messiah may come in two different ways, depending on Israel's state of affairs. If God finds it favorable, the Messiah will come on the clouds of heaven; if not, the Messiah will come on a colt. The problem is, Mark also promises that Jesus will one day come on the clouds of heaven (13:26), and that promise comes at the heel of a long and detailed description of many unfavorable happenings (13:1–25). It is quite unlikely, then, that Mark is following this particular exegesis in writing this episode.

⁹ According to Waetjen (*Reordering of Power*, 182), the traditional understanding that Jesus "cleanses" the temple in Mark 11:15–19 is misleading. Basing his argument on 11:16 ("and he would not allow anyone to carry any goods through the

chides its authorities for robbery as well as distorting God's design (11:17).

The third day-trip (11:20–13:37) begins with the disciples witnessing the withering of a fig tree that Jesus cursed on his way to the temple the day before. Many scholars have commented on the way Mark “sandwiches” this “cleansing” episode between the incident of the fig tree (11:12–14, 20–25), thus creating a parallel between the destiny of the fig tree and that of the temple (see, for example, Perrin and Duling, 254; and Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 193).¹⁰ Just as Jesus curses a fig tree that fails to produce fruit and causes it to wither “from the roots up” (ἐκ ῥιζῶν, 11:20), Jesus’ “cleansing” of a temple institution which has corrupted God’s purpose will lead to its complete demise.

As we have mentioned earlier regarding the first and the second day-trips, Jesus is taking on a much more aggressive role in this cycle of events. Although he is still being questioned on a number of issues by the Jewish authorities on the third day-trip (11:27–33; 12:13–17; 12:18–27; 12:28–34), he also intensifies his charges against the Jewish authorities. After calling them robbers and distortionists the day before, he uses a parable to charge them on the third day-trip of usurpation and murder (12:1–12). Notice also that the last of the four controversies following the parable (the one regarding the relationship between the Messiah and David, 12:35–37) is not raised by the Jewish authorities, but by Jesus himself. As 12:34b (“and no one dared to ask him any question any more” [καὶ οὐδεὶς οὐκέτι ἐτόλμα αὐτὸν ἐπεράτῃσαι]) indicates, Jesus has met all the challenges the

temple” [καὶ οὐκ ἦφιεν ἵνα τις διενέγκῃ σκεῦος διὰ τοῦ ἱεροῦ]), he contends that Jesus is actually stopping all activity, and closing the temple down.

¹⁰ As Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 192–193) points out, the simple phrase “for it is not the season for figs” (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς οὐκ ἦν σύκων, 11:13e) should alert Mark’s readers to the symbolic nature of this incident. However, since this incident of the fig tree spans over the second and the third day-trips, I am of the opinion that its reference should not be limited to Jesus’ “cleansing” of the temple. Waetjen (*Reordering of Power*, 182), for example, has suggested that Jesus’ examination of the leafy fig tree (11:12–13) also corresponds to Jesus’ quiet scrutiny of the temple the day before (11:11); and in both cases, Jesus is not satisfied with what he finds. Tolbert, (*Sowing the Gospel*, 267), on the other hand, sees the withering of the “rootless” fig tree as a reminder of the fate awaiting Jesus’ “rocky” and “rootless” disciples, and, in the literary context of these three day-trips, also contrasts the fruitless fig tree and the sprouting fig tree Jesus describes in the “apocalyptic discourse” (13:28–31) to argue for a sense of hope that Mark presents to its readers. For more detailed accounts of this “sandwiching” technique within the Gospel of Mark, see John R. Donahue, 58–63; and Kermode, 133–140.

Jewish authorities present him; now the tables are turned, and Jesus becomes the one asking the questions.

Jesus proceeds on this third day-trip into Jerusalem's temple, then, to condemn the scribes publicly for hypocrisy, hunger for power, and exploitation (12:38–40)—a feat that may be comparable to a “Washington outsider” holding a press conference in the Rose Garden of the White House to denounce the United States Government. After this session of public “teaching” (ἐν τῇ διδασκῇ αὐτοῦ, 12:38), Jesus privately supports his charges against the Jewish authorities by showing his disciples a “live” demonstration of how a poor widow gives up her livelihood in an offering to the temple institution (12:41–44).¹¹ This last day-trip ends with the “apocalyptic discourse,” which among other things, predicts the collapse of the temple (13:1–2), and designates the Jewish authorities among his disciples’ future persecutors (“But you look out for yourselves; they will turn you into councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues” [βλέπετε δὲ ὑμεῖς ἑαυτοὺς· παραδώσουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς συνέδρια καὶ εἰς συναγωγὰς δαρήσεσθε], 13:9a).

Going back to the controversy on the origin of Jesus’ authority, one may remember that the Jewish leaders have entertained yet another possible origin of Jesus’ authority.¹² Back in Mark 3:19b–30, some of their representatives (“the scribes who came down from Jerusalem” [οἱ γραμματεῖς οἱ ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων], 3:22a) have accused Jesus of deriving his power to exorcize from Beelzabul or Satan. In reply, Jesus points out the absurdity of self-destruction, the lack of

¹¹ In contrast to the more traditional view that sees this widow as an example of Christian piety and self-sacrifice (for example, Kee, *Community*, 149), I am in agreement with scholars like Donald H. Juel (81–82) who sees this episode as an evidence to support Jesus’ charge that the temple has become “a den of robbers” (σπήλαιον ληστῶν, 11:17b), and the more specific and immediate assessment that the Jewish leaders “devour the houses of widows” (οἱ κατεσθίοντες τὰς οἰκίας τῶν χηρῶν, 12:40a). Understanding this episode this way also makes it a smooth and logical transition to Jesus’ adamant prediction that the temple will end in complete collapse (13:1–2).

¹² There seems to be yet another Markan pericope in which the Jewish leaders question the origin of Jesus’ authority, even if the word “authority” is not specifically employed. I am thinking of Mark 8:11–13, in which the Pharisees ask Jesus for “a sign from heaven” (σημεῖον ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 8:11b) to authorize or validate Jesus’ actions. Since the pericope follows Jesus’ second miraculous feeding (8:1–10), and this particular feeding seems to happen on Gentile territory (7:31), what the Pharisees want “authorized” may be the forbidden practice of dining with Gentiles (Dewey, 485). I will further comment on Mark’s Jewish-Gentile relations in the latter part of this chapter.

strength without unity, the implications of his exorcisms as a binding of Satan (for example, Kee, *Community*, 37, 108; Mack, 240; and Juel, 71), and the dire consequence of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. This episode, in effect, sentences the scribes from Jerusalem to “eternal” (αἰωνίου, 3:29) punishment quite early in the story, because—as Juel (36) points out—they have referred to the Holy Spirit that has descended “into” (εἰς) Jesus “like a dove” (ὡς περιστερὰν, 1:10c) as “an unclean spirit” (πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, 3:30b). In addition, I want to suggest that what Jesus says then in his own defense, he enacts in his “cleansing” of the temple, and thus ironically indicts the Jewish authorities for Satanic associations.¹³

As we have seen, the “cleansing” of the temple is linked to the subsequent debate on the origin of Jesus’ authority by virtue of the word “again” (πάλιν, 11:27). Notice then the parallels between what Jesus says “in parables” (ἐν παραβολαῖς, 3:23) after the accusation of his acting by satanic authority, and what he does in the temple before another interrogation about his authority source. He talks about “entering” (εἰσελθὼν) Satan’s “house” (εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν) in 3:27a, and we find Jesus “entered” (εἰσελθὼν, 11:15b) into the temple, which he later specifies as a “house” (οἶκος, 11:17b) that originally belongs to God as one of prayer, but has now become “a den of robbers” (σπήλαιον ληστῆν, 11:17c). He talks about “driving out” (ἐκβάλλειν) demons in 3:23, and he begins to “drive out” (ἐκβάλλειν) those who are buying and selling in the temple in 11:15b. He talks about “ransacking” (διαρπάσει) Satan’s “goods” (τὰ σκεύη) and “house” (τὴν οἰκίαν) in 3:27b, and in 11:15b–16, he is “overturning” (κατέστρεψεν) furniture, and stopping the movement of any “goods” (σκεῦος) through the temple.

This is not the only place in the Gospel, nor am I the only one to suggest that Mark may be subtly associating Jewish authorities with the dominion of the devil. A few scholars (Hamerton-Kelly, 75; Mack, 240; and Waetjen, *Reordering of Power*, 81) have commented on the implications of Jesus’ very first appearance in a synagogue

¹³ If one accepts my previous interpretation of 11:27–33, which suggests that the authority of the Jewish leaders is both originated by and oriented to human beings, we will have yet another Markan verse that may carry negative implication for the Jewish authorities. I am referring to Jesus’ counter-rebuke of Peter in 8:33, in which “Satan” is defined as one who has his or her mind on “human” rather than “divine” things. Note that Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 99–101) has also associated the episode involving Jesus and Beelzebul (3:22–27) with the failure of Mark’s disciples.

(1:21-28), where he is met with the protest of a demon, thus leading to his first exorcism, which he performs within "their synagogue" (ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ αὐτῶν, 1:23). It is arguable, then, that this episode insinuates that Jesus will not find synagogues particularly welcoming, because they are dwelling places of demons, especially in light of the many "less-than-hospitable" synagogue receptions we have discussed, but also because of Mark's summary statement in 1:39. As if to make sure that 1:21-28 will not be taken as an isolated incident, Mark writes: "And he [Jesus] went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and driving out demons" (καὶ ἦλθεν κηρύσσων εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν εἰς ὅλην τὴν Γαλιλαίαν καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια ἐκβάλλων, 1:39).¹⁴

In addition to the above arguments that Mark presents Jewish synagogues as Satan's "breeding ground" within his narrative world, Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 153-154) has also contended that Jewish leaders are designated by Mark to be Satan's "feeding ground." Like the "hard ground" within the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20), where the gospel seeds of Jesus cannot take root because the seeds are immediately snatched by Satan, Jewish authorities maintain the same view towards Jesus from beginning to end. As we have seen, when they come on the scene for the very first time, they accuse Jesus of blasphemy (2:1-12); when the Jewish council finally condemns Jesus to die, its charge against him is still blasphemy (15:53-65). In Mark's depiction, Jewish leaders are weak, wicked, and, perhaps most condemnatory of all, demonic.

Mark's Overall Structure

As Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 113-121) points out, many Markan scholars have divided the main body of the Gospel into two main

¹⁴ Notice also that while the unclean spirit asks if Jesus has come to "destroy" (ἀπολέσαι, 1:24d) them, Jesus uses exactly the same verb to tell the Jewish leaders that God will "destroy" (ἀπολέσει, 12:9b) the "wicked tenants" for the evil they have committed. As Trakatellis points out, the question of the unclean spirit hints at "the impossibility of any coexistence . . . [on the part of the demons] with Jesus" (11). This impossibility is confirmed in the comical scene involving the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-13), in which the demons try to negotiate with Jesus, and beg for a transfer from the demoniac to a herd of swine. While Jesus verbally makes the deal, the demons are nevertheless destroyed, because as soon as the transfer takes place, the swine rush into the lake and drown. By extension, and as the parable of the wicked tenants confirms, it will also be impossible for Jesus and the Jewish leaders to coexist.

sections: the first focusing on Jesus' activities in Galilee, and the second on Jesus' activities in Jerusalem. If one accepts such divisions, he or she may use the content and the locations of the segments in which the word "authority" is mentioned specifically (1:21–28; 2:1–12; and 11:27–12:12) to argue that the Gospel contains a balanced and consistent polemic against the Jewish authorities. In my own outline of the Gospel, the locations of these two segments concerning "authority" become even more nuanced. Adopting the use of geography as a basis to outline Mark, I take the so-called "on-the-way" section (8:22–10:52) as a transition unit that also separates the two major sections of Mark (1:14–8:21; 11:1–15:47).¹⁵ Very early in both major sections then, Mark begins to challenge the authority of the Jewish leaders. I want to argue now that Mark, in a way that is consistent with ancient rhetorical practices, does the same in the closing portion of these two major sections as well.

The last part of Mark's first major section is neatly set off by an *inclusio*: it begins and ends with a miraculous feeding and a boat trip (6:30–52; 8:1–21). The first feeding actually happens as an interruption of a retreat that Jesus and the disciples are planning. The disciples have just returned from their mission, and all of them have needed a little rest and refreshment (6:30–32). In the midst of that, Mark gives us a very specific reason why Jesus abandons his plan for a retreat. At the sight of the crowd gathering around him, Mark writes, "and he [Jesus] had compassion on them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd" (καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ὅτι ἦσαν ὡς πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα, 6:34).

What this explicit reason accomplishes is twofold. It features Jesus' compassion, while at the same time, denounces the Jewish leaders for their lack of love, and their failure to fulfil their calling to care for the people. Mark's (implied) reader would have no problem

¹⁵ Three strong reasons prompt my decision to separate 8:22–10:52 as a separate, transition unit: (1) the unique "on-the-way" (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ) expression that appears regularly, and almost exclusively in this section (8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:32, 52 [the only exception is found in 8:3, which refers not to the journey of Jesus and the disciples from Galilee to Jerusalem, but the trip home that people have to make after a "three-day seminar" with Jesus]; (2) the three passion prediction units (8:27–9:29; 9:30–10:31; 10:32–52)—each unit is made up of a prediction of the passion and resurrection, a misunderstanding on the part of the disciples, and a corrective teaching about discipleship—that structure the section; and (3) the *inclusio* that at the start as well as the end of their journey to Jerusalem, blinded eyes are being opened by Jesus (8:22–26; 10:46–52). To complete my outline of the Gospel, I consider Mark 1:1–13 as a prologue, and Mark 16:1–8 an epilogue.

accepting such an appraisal of the Jewish leaders, since this statement comes at the heels of the episode concerning the death of John the Baptizer, in which King Herod agrees to behead a prophet he loves because of a whimsical promise he makes in his birthday banquet (6:14–29). Jesus' subsequent decision to teach and feed the crowd, however, also reminds me of the four controversy stories that, along with the controversy around the healing of the paralytic (2:1–12), help open this major section about Jesus' Galilean ministry. Three of those four controversies have to do with eating practices: Jesus' decision to eat with "tax collectors and sinners" (τελώναι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ, 2:15b, 16c) at Levi's house (2:13–17); the disciples' refusal to fast (2:18–22); and the disciples' "grain-plucking" and "grain-eating" behavior on the Sabbath (2:23–28). As various scholars have pointed out (for example, Hamerton-Kelly, 78–80; and Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 133–134), these three controversies, plus the following controversy concerning Jesus' healing on the Sabbath (3:1–6), center on basically the same issue: the priority between human needs and ritual laws. While Jesus emphasizes the precedence of human needs, these Jewish leaders, by insisting on the priority of ritual regulations legalistically, fail their own people, and show their hardness of heart.

As if he is worried that his readers would not recall these previous episodes, Mark puts a similar controversy about midway between the two feeding episodes to make a similar point (7:1–23). This controversy starts because Jesus' disciples are eating without washing their hands in accordance to "the tradition of the elders" (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, 7:3, 5).¹⁶ In response, Jesus calls his inquisitors ("the Pharisees and several scribes who had come from Jerusalem" [οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ τινες τῶν γραμματέων ἐλθόντες ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων], 7:1b), "hypocrites" (τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, 7:6), and further counter-charges them for distorting God's intentions by the way they place rituals and traditions before human needs. As part of his counter-attack, Jesus gives the example of how they disregard God's revelation through Moses by teaching people to plead financial commitment to God in extenuation of neglecting aging parents. After closing that particular example with the most incriminatory sentence, "And you do many similar

¹⁶ The exact procedure of this washing ritual has remained unclear because scholars have not been able to decide on the exact meaning of "washing the hands with a fist" (πυγῇ νίπωνται τὰς χεῖρας . . . ἐσθίουσιν, 7:3a). For a clear and concise discussion of the problem, see Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, 220–221.

things like these” (καὶ παρόμοια τοιαῦτα πολλὰ ποιεῖτε, 7:13b), Jesus turns to teach the crowd, and then privately his disciples about the importance of the human heart. What he says, in effect, explains the problem of the Jewish leaders: their hearts are hard, because their hearts are evil.¹⁷

The second feeding opens with a similar statement emphasizing Jesus’ compassion on the people, although this time it is verbalized by Jesus himself (8:2a). The bulk of the “Jewish-leadership-bashing,” however, is found in the ensuing boat trip (8:11–21). As we have mentioned briefly in a footnote, 8:11 makes it clear that these Jewish leaders do not come to question Jesus out of curious or inquiring minds. Instead, they come with intent and malice; they come “with the purpose to test” (πειράζοντες, 8:11c) Jesus. As a result, Jesus issues a direct warning against their “leaven” (τῆς ζύμης, 8:15) or influence. When the disciples mis-take his warning for a reprimand against their negligence to bring bread, Jesus gets exasperated, and reminds them of the two miraculous feedings. Obviously, the two feedings contain the key to understanding for the disciples. Without doubt, the feedings should have reminded the disciples of Jesus’ supernatural ability to provide an overabundant food supply, thus making the disciples’ worry over bread superfluous. Following the line of arguments I have been developing over the last few pages, however, I would suggest that these two feedings should also present a vivid contrast between Jesus’ concern with human welfare and the Jewish leaders’ emphasis on legalism. This set of mixed-up priorities may well be the “leaven” against which the disciples should be on the look out.

My contention is, then, that the end of the first major section of Mark focuses on the way the Jewish authorities favor legalism over compassion, and thus fail their task to shepherd the people. The end of the second major section (14:1–15:47) focuses on the way they murder Jesus with deceit and corruption, as well as the way God condemns their action. Although it is “two days before the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread” (ἦν δὲ τὸ πάσχα καὶ τὰ ἄζυμα μετὰ δύο ἡμέρας, 14:1a), the “leaven” of the Jewish authorities which Jesus warns against is nonetheless at work. After an explicit statement that

¹⁷ This issue regarding the priority of human needs and ritual regulation is brought up again in Mark 12:28–24, in which Mark has a scribe acknowledge, in agreement with Jesus, that loving God and loving one’s fellow beings are “much more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (περισσότερον . . . πάντων τῶν ὀλοκαυτωμάτων καὶ θυσιῶν, 12:33c).

they work “by deceit” (ἐν δόλῳ, 14:1b), Mark proceeds to give specific accounts of their deceitful ways. First of all, they add leaven to Judas’ initiative to betray Jesus with a monetary reward (14:11). Then, as Jesus’ verbal protest during his arrest (14:48–49) implies, they capture Jesus secretly late at night,¹⁸ and violently with “swords and clubs” (μετὰ μαχαίρων καὶ ξύλων, 14:43c, 48b). Twice in the account of Jesus’ appearance before the Jewish council, Mark emphasizes that their testimonies against Jesus are false and inconsistent; in fact, he does so consecutively, in back-to-back verses (14:56–59). In response to the narrator’s comment that they cannot find any valid testimony to convict Jesus (14:55), the high priest can only ask a rhetorical question that effectually dismisses the need for any sound and satisfactory witness: “Why do we still have need of witnesses?” (Τί ἔτι χρεῖαν ἔχομεν μαρτύρων, 14:63b).

All these themes are conveniently repeated and reemphasized by Mark in Jesus’ appearance before Pilate. Once again, Mark makes it clear that despite the number of charges the Jewish leaders have stacked against Jesus (“they accused . . . many things” [κατηγοροῦν . . . πολλά], 15:3; and “how many things they are accusing” [πόσα . . . κατηγοροῦσιν], 15:4c), the motive behind it all is “jealousy” (διὰ φθόνον, 15:10). When Pilate offers to give Jesus his annual festival amnesty, the crowd refuses because of the manipulation the Jewish leaders are performing behind the scene. Mark writes, “But the chief priests stirred up the crowd so that he [Pilate] would release Barabbas to them instead” (οἱ δὲ ἀρχιερεῖς ἀνέσεισαν τὸν ὄχλον ἵνα μᾶλλον τὸν Βαραββᾶν ἀπολύσῃ αὐτοῖς, 15:11). When Pilate asks them what he should do with Jesus as well as what wrong Jesus has committed, the crowd never answers Pilate’s latter question, but becomes increasingly emotional in their request to have Jesus crucified (“but they shouted even more” [οἱ δὲ περισσῶς ἔκραξαν], 15:14c). Although the Jewish leaders are not specifically mentioned in the crowd’s latter response, one may safely assume from its earlier plea for Barabbas and the similar inability of the high priest to convict Jesus with a valid testimony that this hysteria is also a result of the Jewish authorities’ maneuvering. In other words, they have whipped the crowd into a frenzy to destroy Jesus.¹⁹

¹⁸ This is also shown by the specific time reference to the Passover meal in 14:17a (“when it was evening” [καὶ ὥρας γενομένης]), and the disciples’ need for sleep in 14:32–42.

¹⁹ Some scholars have argued that Mark’s account of Jesus’ trial before the Jewish

These deceitful orchestrations do not, however, go unnoticed by God. Mark's special reference to the so-called "rending of the [temple] veil" immediately after Jesus expires (15:37-38) is, to borrow Mack's terms, "the signature of [God's] judgment" (287) on the Jewish authorities. Just as the high priest who tears his clothes to express horror of Jesus' "blasphemy" and/or the solemn certainty of his judgment (thus, as we mentioned, nullifying the need for further witness) in 14:63, this utter tear ("from top to bottom" [ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω], 15:38b) of the temple curtain may intimate similar responses on God's part towards the blasphemous actions of the Jewish leaders.²⁰

Mark's polemic against the Jewish authorities does not rest even in the transition unit that bridges Jesus' activities in Galilee and Jerusalem (8:22-10:52). As Jesus and the disciples travel from Bethsaida towards Jerusalem, Jesus makes three predictions about his upcoming death (8:31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34). In the first and the last of these three predictions, the Jewish authorities are explicitly identified as the people who will play a part in bringing about Jesus' demise ("the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes," 8:31; "the chief priests and the scribes," 10:33). "Some Pharisees" (Φαρισαῖοι, 10:2) also make a brief appearance "with the purpose to test him" [πειράζοντες αὐτόν], 10:2) on the subject of divorce (10:1-12). In harmony with the rest of the Gospel, the Jewish leaders are re-presented within this section as conniving opponents of Jesus who will eventually take Jesus' life. As Hamerton-Kelly (1) observes, Jesus' passion in Mark is both geographically and ideologically inseparable from his conflict with

council is, according to the standard practice of the time, intentionally fraught with improprieties. Waetjen (*Reordering of Power*, 219), for example, contends that the meeting of the Sanhedrin should traditionally be held in the council chamber rather than the high priest's residence. Since the so-called "standard practice" of the Jewish council is still debatable, I am limiting my observations to what is available within the text.

²⁰ The meaning of the temple curtain being torn has been interpreted in a variety of ways. For Hamerton-Kelly (2, 56-57), for example, it is the demystification of the temple institution, and the accessibility of God for all humanity, as evidenced by the confession of the Roman centurion (15:39). Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 280-281), argues that since the same verb (σχίζω) is used for the tearing of the heavens at Jesus' baptism (1:10), the reference to the tearing of the temple curtain may signify Jesus' transit to the heavenly world. Similarly, Juel (34-36) suggests that this verb (σχίζω) forms an *inclusio* between Jesus' baptism and his death, with Jesus' death signifying the estrangement of the world from God. Notice that the Jewish authorities are still implicated, whether the emphasis is on God's acceptance of all humanity, God's specific approval of Jesus, or God's alienation from the world.

the temple:²¹ the temple itself is, of course, the geographical and ideological core of Jewish authority and power.

Assaulting Roman Authorities

Mark's critical re-presentations of the Jewish leaders as weak, wicked, devious, and jealous have caused some to question if the Gospel is, intentionally or not, promoting a form of anti-Judaism (for example, Mack).²² One needs to realize, however, that Mark is at least equally critical of non-Jewish authorities (in both the text and [con]text of Mark, Gentile authorities turn out to be inevitably Roman).²³ For example, in response to the squabble over the request of James and John for the next best seats in God's kingdom (10:35–41), Mark's Jesus corrects his disciples by denouncing the type of rule Gentiles (read Romans) practice with a specific verb that stems from the root "authority" (ἐξουσία): "You know that the ones who are supposed to rule the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over (κατεξουνιάζουσιν) them. But it is not so among you"

²¹ The geographical associations between Mark's passion narrative and the temple precinct should not require any extra comment. Ideologically, Hamerton-Kelly (1) makes a couple of specific connections: the way Mark's passion narrative begins with Jesus' "cleansing" of the temple (11:15–19), and the way it focuses on Jesus' foretelling of its destruction (Mark 13:1–37; 14:58).

²² As I pointed out in the last chapter, Mack sees Mark as an attempt to legitimize the existence of the Jesus movement independently of the synagogue. Other scholars have followed Brandon's idea and argued that Mark tends to blame the Jewish leaders instead of the Romans for Jesus' death, though these scholars do not raise or deal with the question of anti-Judaism; for example, see Brian K. Blount, 104–105; and Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 305.

²³ Juel (137) has also accurately pointed out that the generic term, "the Jews" comes mainly from Roman mouths within the passion narrative (15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26). The only other appearance of this generic term is found in 7:3, where the narrator explains that "all the Jews" (πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) have adopted the Pharisaic tradition of hand-washing. In addition to charging the Jewish leaders for hypocrisy and distorting God's commands, Jesus also takes time to tell the crowd about the emptiness of this particular custom (7:14–15). This, plus the fact that Jesus dies bearing the title "The King of the Jews," may indicate the Gospel's solidarity with the Jewish people. At the very least, Mark's Jesus is presented as a threatening enigma for both Jews and non-Jews. Despite Jesus' remark to his fellow Nazarenes that "A prophet is not dishonored except in one's own native place, and among one's own kin, and in one's own house" (Οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς συγγενέσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ, 6:4b), he is also rejected by, say, the Gerasenes (5:14–17). Dewey (499) also argues, on the basis of 12:13–14, that Mark's Jesus has never denied basic Jewish beliefs in his criticism of the Jewish establishment.

(10:42b-43a). After defining Roman authority categorically as oppressive and authoritarian in one verse, Mark's Jesus proceeds to author a new understanding that features servanthood and sacrifice (10:43b-45).²⁴ In the last passion prediction, the Gentiles (τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, 10:33e) are identified as the ones who will, in cooperation with the Jewish leaders, torment and kill Jesus. Four vivid and violent verbs are used to describe what the Gentiles will do to Jesus: they "will ridicule" (ἐμπαίζουσιν, 10:34a) him, they "will spit on" (ἐμπύσουσιν, 10:34b) him, they "will whip" (μαστιγώσουσιν, 10:34c) him, and they "will kill" (ἀποκτενοῦσιν, 10:34d) him. Likewise, both Gentile ("governors" [ἡγεμόνων] and "kings" [βασιλέων] in 13:9d) and Jewish leaders ("councils" [συνέδρια] and "synagogues" [συναγωγὰς] in 13:9b and c) are listed side by side as those who will hound the disciples in the "apocalyptic discourse."

The projection of the passion prediction as well as that of the "apocalyptic discourse" are, of course, confirmed in the passion narrative (14:1-15:47). The Markan parallel between the death of John the Baptizer and that of Jesus is by now well known (for example, Kee, *Community*, 146), what remains to be emphasized is a similar parallel played by Herod and Pilate (see Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 273). Both Herod and Pilate occupy an official position that gives them power to decide on the fate of a "God-sent." Both are intrigued by their prisoner in a somewhat favorable manner; Herod is puzzled and delighted by what the Baptizer has to say at the same time (6:20d and e), while Pilate is amazed by Jesus' silence (15:5). Like Herod, Pilate realizes that the accused standing before him is not guilty (6:19-20; 15:10, 14a), but lacks the strength to do the right thing. Instead, both Herod and Pilate succumb to "people-pressure," and sentence an innocent person to death on an occasion of festivity (6:21, 26-28; 15:6, 14b-15). Read in light of this parallel, the Roman governor's "policy of expediency" (Waetjen, *Reordering of Power*, 7) appears just as weak as his Jewish counterpart. Moreover, as

²⁴ Dewey (495, 498) stresses the importance for Mark's readers to recognize that this command to serve and sacrifice is not given to women, children, slaves, nor other marginalized people within the Gospel; instead, it is given to the disciples, who occupy a place of power within the context of the Christian church. For Dewey, carelessly universalizing such a command without recognizing people's specific social status will only lead to further exploitation and victimization. Schüssler Fiorenza ("Practice," 190-191) argues, however, that calling those in power to serve without critiquing the power structure itself only confirms the status and privilege of those in power.

Hamerton-Kelly (55) points out, the fact that Pilate is out-maneuvered by the Jewish leaders in his attempt to make Jesus the recipient of his Passover amnesty (15:6–11) may further weaken our image of Roman power.²⁵

If we have any inkling that Pilate's weakness may have exonerated the Romans in the death of Jesus, it should dissipate with Pilate's decision to have Jesus "scourged" (φραγελλώσας, 15:15d) first, and the mean-spirited behavior of the Roman soldiers in the ensuing episode (15:16–24). Just as Jesus predicts in the third passion narrative (10:34), they "struck" (ἔτυπτον, 15:19a), "spat on" (ἐνέπτυνον, 15:19b), "ridiculed" (ἐνέπαιξαν, 15:20a), and "crucified" (σταυροῦσιν, 15:24a) him. Mark's detailed account of the ridicule (15:17–19) suggests that these Roman soldiers are doing much more than simply carrying out their duty to execute a "criminal"; they are equal participants who take joy in destroying Jesus. The fact that the Romans are equally culpable is also readily demonstrated by the basically parallel description Mark makes regarding the way the Jewish leaders treat Jesus after his trial before the high priest: "And some began to spit on him, and cover his face, and pound him, and say to him, 'Prophecy!' And the servants took him over, and beat him up" (Καὶ ἤρξαντό τινες ἐμπτύειν αὐτῷ καὶ περικαλύπτειν αὐτοῦ τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ κολαφίζειν αὐτὸν καὶ λέγειν αὐτῷ, Προφήτευσον, καὶ οἱ ὑπηρέται 'ραπίσμασιν αὐτὸν ἔλαβον, 14:65; see also Hamerton-Kelly, 56; and Kee, *Community*, 146).

There is yet another parallelism that implicates both Jewish and Roman authorities for the death of Jesus. The two trial scenes in which Jesus is questioned by the high priest and Pilate respectively are parallel, although in a somewhat inverted manner (Myers, 370–371).²⁶ The first trial (14:53–62) starts with a variety of accusations against Jesus; when the high priest asks Jesus two questions, Jesus ignores the first, but answers his second question. The second trial

²⁵ In contrast to Hamerton-Kelly, Myers (374–375) argues that Pilate's offer to release Jesus (15:9) and the Jewish leaders' manipulative work among the crowd to have Barabbas freed instead (15:11) is a collaborative effort between the Roman and Jewish authorities to destroy a common threat.

²⁶ For a somewhat different opinion, see Blount (100), who argues for a causal relationship between the two trials scenes on the basis of Mark's syntax: the main transition sentence between the two trials (15:1) is made up of two main verbs ("they led away" [ἀπήνεγκαν]; "they delivered up" [παρέδωκαν]), and two aorist participles ("having held a consultation" [συμβούλιον ποιήσαντες]; "having bound" [δήσαντες]).

(15:1–5), on the other hand, starts with a question by Pilate, and an answer from Jesus, then comes a one-verse report from the narrator that the Jewish leaders have brought a number of charges against Jesus. Finally, Pilate asks his second question, but Jesus remains silent.

These last two parallelisms (one regarding the physical abuse suffered by Jesus, and the other his trial) may not only implicate both Jewish and Roman leaders, they may further suggest a collaborative relationship between them when it comes to Jesus. Indeed, such a relationship may be insinuated in an earlier episode, in which Jesus is confronted with the question about paying taxes to Caesar (12:13–17). As many have pointed out, that question means to “catch” Jesus in a dilemma where he has to choose between offending Jewish or Roman sensibilities. In other words, as long as they can accomplish the main objective of “catching” Jesus, these Jewish leaders are ready to appeal to the Romans, and align themselves with Caesar’s authority.²⁷ As we have seen, the equally weak and wicked Roman authorities are more than happy to collaborate against Jesus.

Let me go back to this controversy about paying taxes to Caesar, because I think Jesus’ reply contains an implicit challenge against the Roman authorities, even though Mark makes it clear that Jesus is able to elude the “catch” with a rather ambiguous comment: “Return to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and return to God what belongs to God” (Τὰ Καίσαρος ἀπὸδοτε Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῷ θεῷ, 12:17b). We know from the passage what belongs to Caesar is the denarius (12:15b–16), but what is it that belongs to God?

In the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–12) that immediately precedes this controversy, Mark’s Jesus talks about something that belongs to God. What belongs to God is a vineyard that God created, and God is expecting a proper share of its produce (12:1–2). Whether one interprets the vineyard as Israel or the world (or both),

²⁷ I agree with Waetjen’s conclusion (*Reordering of Power*, 189–190) that this episode suggests a collaboration between the Jewish and Roman authorities. I disagree, however, with his evidence for reaching such a conclusion. Waetjen bases his argument on the assumption that a coin bearing Caesar’s inscription should be offensive to Jewish sensibilities, the fact that the Jewish leaders can readily present a denarius upon Jesus’ request proves to Waetjen, then, that they have already sold out to the Romans. What Waetjen fails to take into consideration is the disciples’ response when Jesus asks them to feed the five thousand who have interrupted their retreat. Since the disciples immediately think about buying “two hundred denarii” (δυναρίων διακοσίων, 6:37) of food, Mark seems to understand the denarius as an accepted currency that does not necessarily carry with it any political implication.

Rome's colonization of Israel, and its status as the main imperial power of the time place the Roman authorities as tenants who, in spite of their apparent control over the vineyard, are ultimately accountable to God. Their participation in the abuse and murder of Jesus (10:33–34; 15:1–24), as well as the apocalyptic prediction that they will do the same to persecute Jesus' disciples (13:9), clearly mark them as part of the present, wicked tenants whom God will come to remove and destroy in due time.

One may also recall that twice within the Gospel of Mark (9:33–37; 10:13–16), Jesus uses children as an object lesson to teach his disciples that their service and sacrifice should benefit those who have little or no power in society. This teaching comes with a stern warning that failure to do so will lead to a fate more regrettable than drowning in the sea (9:42–48). In light of the negative evaluation Jesus makes regarding the way Gentiles or Romans use power (10:42b–43a), the warning may insinuate a certain apocalyptic terror that will await the Romans.²⁸

Mark's apocalyptic rhetoric may also be taken as a basis to further nuance his charges against the Jewish leaders. Various studies on the relationship between ancient Jewish apocalyptic and colonial politics have suggested that ancient Jewish apocalyptic writers, in the interest of self-preservation, tend to level their attacks at a more benign target than the imperialists themselves (see also Tolbert, "When

²⁸ Another Markan pericope that has been featured by some scholars to argue for Mark's anti-Roman or anti-colonial politics is that of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20). Both Myers (190–194) and Waetjen (*Reordering of Power*, 115–117), for example, understand the demon's name "Legion" [Λεγιών, 5:9d] as a Latin term that refers to the Roman armies, and relate the demoniac's condition to Fanon's (*Wretched*, 55–61, 249–310) studies on colonialism and mental disorder. Waetjen further suggests that the "unusually large number" (*Reordering of Power*, 118) of pigs (two thousand in Mark's estimate [5:13]) that Jesus destroys is actually a food supply for the Roman armies. If one accepts this argument, one may further argue, on the basis of the parallelism between 5:1–5 and 3:23–27, that Mark equates Rome with Satan: in response to the accusation that he drives out demons by the power of Beelzebub, Jesus compares Satan to a "strong man" (ἰσχυρός, 3:27) who needs to be "bound" (δῆω, 3:27b); and in the Gerasene demoniac, we meet a man whom nobody and nothing is "strong" (ἰσχύω, 5:4c) enough to "bind" (δέξ, 5:3b), with the exception of the "stronger" Jesus (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός, 1:7b). Dewey (480–481, 483), who basically adopts the anti-Roman interpretation of the Gerasene episode mentioned above, also follows Kee's (*Community*, 111–112) suggestion that Jesus' ability to manipulate the water of the lake and to feed people in the desert (4:35–41; 6:30–52; 8:1–10) may be alluding to the Exodus event of the Hebrew scripture; what she and Kee fail to mention, however, is the (anti-)colonial implications of the Exodus event, and thus by association, of the Markan episodes.

Resistance Becomes Repression," 336).²⁹ Kee (*Community*, 81), for instance, talks about a prevailing theme of judgment on Israel's "faithless" leaders in the Zechariah Apocalypse (Zachariah 9-14), the Dream Vision of 1 Enoch (83-90), and a Qumran text (11QPs^a). Likewise, Collins (*Apocalyptic Imagination*, 186) gives as an example the Apocalypse of Abraham, which seems to blame the Zealots as well as the Jewish priesthood for the destruction of the temple. Horsley ("Imperial Situation," 397-400), citing Peter Worsley's work on the "third world," argues that anti-colonial sentiments among the Jews of New Testament times were often "deflected" from Roman imperialists onto indigenous aristocracy (see also Horsley, "Popular Messianic Movements," 99). Even Olster, who indicates a "renaissance" of apocalyptic rhetoric as the Roman Empire itself came under Arab invasion during the later Byzantine period, notes the "curious" (182) anti-Jewish rather than anti-Islamic emphasis that was found within the literature of that time. Is it possible, then, that Mark's verbal assault of the Jewish authorities is a similar tactic of "scapegoating"?

Apocalyptic, Anti-Authority and Barrier-Breaking

In addition to his criticisms of Jewish and Roman authorities, Mark also intimates his discontent with the ruling powers of his day by the way he identifies and situates Jesus' faithful followers. Most of the people who respond favorably to Jesus are weak, and at the lower strata, if not the margins, of society; one can think of the leper (1:40-45), the tax collectors and sinners (2:13-17), the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20), the woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years (5:25-34), the Syrophenician woman (7:24-30), the blind beggar called Bartimaeus (10:46-52), or the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus with a jar of expensive nard (14:3-9).³⁰ In contrast to the pos-

²⁹ S. C. Wong (77-117), in her study of Asian American literature, also talks about a recurrent theme in which Asian American characters, upon encountering other Asian American characters who remind them of their own non-white state and internally colonized status (what S. C. Wong calls "racial shadows"), project their internalization of racist ideas and their own self-hate by harassing and terrorizing these easier targets. In that light, Mark's attack of the Jewish leaders (rather than their Roman colonizers) may be one of self-preservation as well as one of self-hate.

³⁰ According to Juel (66-70), this amounts to a virtual breakdown of social boundaries between insiders and outsiders, which proves to be disturbing for both Jews

itive responses of these “have-nots,” Mark typifies the negative response of the “haves” with the comic yet tragic assessment that camels will have a better chance going through the eye of a needle than for those with wealth and power entering the kingdom (10:25).³¹ Mark’s readers should remember that the negative response he has in mind is not a kind of harmless indifference, but a hostile form of persecution; and Mark is so sure of such an oppressive reality that he has Jesus warning his disciples repeatedly about this inevitability (8:34–38; 10:35–39; 13:9–23).

Mark’s polemic against those in power is, of course, related to his apocalyptic understanding. As Belsey notes, “utopias constitute evidence of a hope, however faint, that the future might be other than the present; they demonstrate, that is to say, a desire for change” (*Desire*, 186; see also Kee, *Community*, 71–72).³² For Mark, such change will take place at the parousia (8:38–9:1; 13:24–27; 14:62).³³ Jesus’ coming again, in Mark’s Gospel, will bring about a “general cosmic cataclysm” (James A. Wilde, 60) that signifies a “shake-up” of present political powers.³⁴ The idea that the heavenly convulsion described in Mark 13:24–25 signifies a socio-political commotion is not only supported by the emphasis on wars in 13:7–8, but also by the “end-time judgment” that Mark’s Jesus seems to imply in 8:38, 12:9, 12:36, and 14:61–62. Although the warnings of judgment in Mark 12 and

and Gentiles alike (see, for example, 2:16; 5:14–17). The fact that Mark includes a number of women in his portrayals of the faithful also naturally leads to the question of patriarchy and gender in his Gospel; for my discussion of this topic, see Chapter VI.

³¹ Like today, money is a widely recognized “passport” to honor and power in the Greco-Roman world. I consider it reasonable, then, to associate this Markan comment on wealth with the Gospel’s overall attitude towards those in authority.

³² One is also reminded of other ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings, like the *Similitudes of Enoch*, in which “the kings and the powerful” are equated with those “who have denied the name of the Lord of Spirits” (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 146).

³³ Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 259–260) observes that the beginning of the “apocalyptic discourse” features two words (“stones” [λίθοι, 13:1c, 2c] and “buildings” [οικοδομαί, 13:1c, 2b]) that should remind Mark’s readers of the scriptural quote attached to the end of the parable of the wicked tenants. Since the scriptural quote talks about Jesus being the “stone” (λίθον, 12:10b) rejected by “those who build buildings” (οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, 12:10b), and how he would end up becoming the “cornerstone” (κεφαλὴν γωνίας, 12:10c) of a new edifice, Tolbert suggests that the apocalyptic discourse offers an explanation of how this “amazing” (θαυμαστή, 12:11b) turn-around will take place.

³⁴ In typical ancient Jewish apocalyptic fashion, the supernatural and the earthly often interact and merge into one within Mark’s Gospel (see, for example, Jack Dean Kingsbury, 1–2; and Waetjen, *Reordering of Power*, 200–201).

Mark 14 are directed at Jewish authorities, the thought that Mark may have in mind a greater socio-political “shake-up” is foreshadowed by the confession of the Roman centurion at the scene, and at the end, of Jesus’ crucifixion (15:39).

With the exception of Peter (8:29), this Roman centurion is the only other human character within Mark who makes a verbal confession of Jesus as God’s anointed. Rather than seeing it as “Mark’s concern for the Gentiles” (Perrin and Duling, 254), however, I want to inter(con)textualize the episode, and remind us that this confessor is not any ordinary Gentile, but a military officer of imperial Rome. The significance of having a colonizer of the Jews confessing to “the (crucified) King of the Jews” may be best expressed by Sinfield, who writes, “Personal confession becomes simultaneously a public acknowledgment of the rightness of that which was challenged. It is, of course, one of the most authoritative ideological legitimization available . . . [that is] to be sincerely validated by former opponents” (*Faultlines*, 118).³⁵

In addition to his charges against—and promises to overturn both Jewish and Roman authorities, Mark’s apocalyptic emphasis is also related to other challenges that he makes against various forms of traditional authorities. Mark’s Jesus is willing, for example, to override customary familial obligations on the basis of one’s commitment to the “good news.” When his mother and siblings attempt to place a “restraining order” on his activities (3:21, 31–32), Jesus responds by treating them as “outsiders” (ἐξω; 3:31, 32), and talks about a new “family” that is based on one’s decision to do God’s will rather than one’s blood ties (3:33–35). This promise of a new family is reiterated by Jesus in response to Peter’s comment, following a rich man’s decision to depart from Jesus rather than his many possessions, that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus. Starting

³⁵ Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 335 n. 7) mentions two exceptions among Mark’s Jewish authorities who respond to Jesus favorably: (1) Jairus, whom Mark identifies as “one of the rulers of the synagogue” (εἰς τῶν ἀρχισυναγῶγων, 5:22a); and (2) Joseph of Arimathea, who takes care of Jesus’ burial (15:43–46). Ideologically, these two “exceptions” may serve the same function as the Roman centurion in legitimizing Jesus’ authority and foreshadowing his ultimate victory. In addition, let us not forget about the scribe who asks Jesus about the “first commandment” (12:28–34). Because he concurs with Jesus’ answer, the scribe is deemed “wise” (νοῦνεχῶς, 12:34a) and “not far from God’s kingdom” (οὐ μακρὰν . . . ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, 12:34b); perhaps more importantly, notice how Mark comments that this scribe’s acknowledgment of Jesus’ correctness leads to the silencing of Jesus’ opponents (12:34c).

with "Truly I say to you" (Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, 10:29b), or what Bratcher and Nida call "an emphatic introductory particle" (326), Mark's Jesus declares that "there is no one who has left a house or brothers or sisters or a mother or a father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold in this age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields along with persecutions, and in the coming age eternal life" (οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν ὃς ἀφῆκεν οἰκίαν ἢ ἀδελφοὺς ἢ ἀδελφὰς ἢ μητέρα ἢ πατέρα ἢ τέκνα ἢ ἀγροὺς ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ ἕνεκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ἐὰν μὴ λάβῃ ἑκατονταπλασίονα νῦν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ οἰκίας καὶ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ ἀδελφὰς καὶ μητέρας καὶ τέκνα καὶ ἀγροὺς μετὰ διωγμῶν, καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ ζῶνι αἰώνιον. 10:29c-30). The fact that this change in familial relations is connected with Mark's apocalyptic understanding can be seen in the "apocalyptic discourse" as well as Jesus' encounter with the Sadducees. In the "apocalyptic discourse," disintegration of natural family relations, caused by mutual betrayal, is given as a sign of the apocalypse (13:12); Jesus' response to the Sadducees, on the other hand, contains an implicit critique of the Sadducees' failure to move, in light of the resurrection, beyond traditional understandings of marriage and family (12:18-27, particularly verse 25).

Not only does the welfare of children seem to become a matter of communal responsibility (9:33-37, 42; 10:13-16) as faithful obedience to God replaces heredity as the new basis of "familial relations," the traditional barrier between Jews and Gentiles also becomes a thing of the past. Mark's apocalyptic promise of a racially or ethnically inclusive eschatological community (13:10, 27) is already echoed in Jesus' ministry. Welcoming those who come to him from beyond Galilee (3:7-12) as well as going beyond Galilee to minister himself (5:1; 6:45; 7:24, 31), Mark's Jesus models his promise that the gospel is to be preached to the entire world (14:9b).³⁶ Judging from the

³⁶ Many scholars have pointed out the implications that Jesus' geographical movements may have on Jewish-Gentile relations within the Gospel of Mark. Kee (*Community*, 33-34, 95), for example, argues that Mark's inclusive vision can be seen by the way he narrates a first series of miracles (1:21-6:44) which, with the exception of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20), take place primarily on Jewish soil, along with a second cycle of miracles (6:45-8:26) that happens mainly on Gentile territory. For Kee, the numbers (twelve and seven) featured in each cycle's concluding feeding miracle also serve to highlight the equality and unity of Jews and Gentiles. For Kelber (30-42), this same theme is expressed by Mark alternatively through six boat trips that Jesus makes back and forth across the lake of Galilee (4:35-8:21,

scriptural quotation that the temple should be “a house of prayer for all the nations” (οἶκος προσευχῆς . . . πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, 11:17), cultic exclusivity also seems to be a major reason behind Jesus’ “cleansing” of the temple (Hamerton-Kelly, 18; and Kee, *Community*, 115).

In addition to family and ethnicity, oppressive rituals and traditions represent another form of established powers that Mark’s Jesus comes to demolish. Much to the dismay of the Jewish leaders, Jesus consistently ignores and violates their established laws, whether they have to do with cultic cleanliness (1:40–44; 2:15–17; 7:1–23), fasting (2:18–22) or the Sabbath (1:21–31; 2:23–3:6).³⁷ As an explanation to those who are puzzled by his unconventional and non-conforming actions, Jesus gives three metaphors—fasting in the bridegroom’s company at a wedding feast, sewing a piece of new cloth on an old garment, and storing new wine in old wineskins—to illustrate the incompatibility of a new age and a set of old laws (2:18–22). For Mark, apocalyptic understanding leads to the abrogation of yet another ancient authority.³⁸

Mark’s anti-authority stance can further be seen by the numerous criticisms he makes against the desire for power (Tolbert, “When Resistance Becomes Repression,” 335). Mark is obviously dissatisfied with the Jewish leaders about many things, but his arguably most direct and public denunciation of them centers on their craving for

rather than sequentially as Kee suggests. See also Perrin and Duling (242–243), who purport that “Galilee” in 14:28 and 16:7 is no longer a literal geographical location, but a symbol for world mission.

³⁷ Not only are Mark’s challenges against ethnic chauvinism and ritual regulations related to his polemic against the Jewish leaders, he also seems to craft these episodes in very tight and intricate manners (Dewey, 481). For example, Mark has Jesus transgressing several ritual taboos in one brief episode concerning the Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20); he treads on an unclean graveyard in a Gentile territory, and casts out unclean demons into an unclean herd of swine. Similarly, we find Jesus coming into contact with two “doubly” impure figures in the next episode(s): a dead girl (5:21–24, 35–43), and a bleeding woman (5:25–34).

³⁸ According to Werblowsky, Jewish messianic movements often feature an antinomian emphasis. Relating such an emphasis to these movements’ attempt to challenge foreign domination, Werblowsky (44) writes:

There was an inner logic to these antinomian potentialities. After all, the “yoke” of the law, whilst beloved, light and sweet on the conscious level, undoubtedly represented on the unconscious level the symbol of a life circumscribed and limited on all sides. It thus functioned as the internal counterpart . . . of the outer limitations and restrictions imposed by life in exile and by subjection to a hostile, gentile environment. If the messianic advent meant freedom, shaking off the yoke, and the making of all things new and different, then it is not surprising that the possibility of untrammelled, antinomian freedom should also manifest itself now and then.

glory and honor (12:38–40). While their lust for power will drive them to persecute Jesus and his followers, this same lust will cause even Jesus' own followers to falsify Jesus' messianic claim (13:6, 21–22; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 284 n. 25). In fact, a constant source of contention between Jesus and his disciples has to do with their obsession with splendor and power. Not long after Peter's disapproval of Jesus' first passion prediction (8:31–33), we begin to find the disciples first subtly savoring their participation in the meeting between the transfigured Jesus and Moses and Elijah (9:5), and then openly jockeying for the leading position (9:33–34). Even as Jesus, holding a child in his arms, tries to teach them about a community that includes the marginalized and serves the weak (9:35–37), John interrupts with a sample case of one whom he deems excludable because that person is, in John's words, "not following us" (οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν, 9:38c, emphasis mine). As if to underscore the disciples' inability to learn this particular lesson, Mark, in the chapter immediately following, has them acting as barriers to refuse rather than receive children (10:13–16), being too readily impressed by wealth (10:17–27),³⁹ and once again, fighting over the "pecking order" among themselves (10:35–45).⁴⁰ Locked between a "rock and their hard heads,"⁴¹ the disciples are unable to hear what Jesus has to say about his upcoming suffering in Jerusalem, nor are they capable of envisioning with Jesus a community that is inclusive and egalitarian. This "unteachability" on the part of the disciples is shown by their fascination with the grandeur of the temple in Jerusalem (13:1), and their subsequent failure during Jesus' passion. Whether by way of betrayal (14:42b–45), flight (14:50–52), or denial (14:54, 66–72), the disciples' failure demonstrates the incongruence of the gospel and self-enhancement (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 216).

The failure of the disciples may be yet another segment of Mark's

³⁹ Note that in the midst of his criticism regarding the scribes' yearning for recognition, Mark's Jesus also inserts the statement about their financial exploitation of widows (12:40a, 41–44). Mark also seems to implicate the disciples on the matter of money with the subtle comment that Judas finalizes his offer to betray Jesus on the promise of a monetary reward (14:10–11, see Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 211).

⁴⁰ According to Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 227–228), Mark's polemic against personal desire for glory and power provides also the key to understand the Gospel's secrecy motif: both Jesus' command for silence and his avoidance of crowds are models of self-effacement to be emulated.

⁴¹ If memory does not fail me, I owe this phrase to George Lyons, who used it to describe Peter's dilemma in Mark in a class lecture.

anti-authority stance. Personally called (1:16-20; 3:13), individually named (3:16-19), and collectively designated as the “Twelve” and, in some manuscripts, “apostles” (3:14, 16a), they are marked by Mark as Jesus’ special companions and representatives (3:14c-15) who are privy to Jesus’ private instruction (4:33-34; 9:28-29; 13:3-4). As the Gospel unfolds, however, their roles as disciples are often played, and replaced, by other, unexpected figures.⁴² For example, the first person who preaches the gospel in addition to Jesus is the Gerasene demoniac instead of the so-called “disciples” (5:19-20). While a storm overwhelms these Twelve with faithless fear (4:35-41), a woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years and a father of a twelve-year-old girl have faith to overcome sickness and death (5:21-43). Accounts of Jesus curing people of demon-possession (7:24-30; 9:14-28), deafness (7:31-37), and blindness (8:22-26; 10:46-52) immediately before and right within the “on-the-way” section (7:24-8:21; 8:22-10:52) are alternated with episodes in which Jesus finds it impossible to do the same for his disciples (8:14-21; 8:31-9:13; 9:30-49; 10:13-16; 10:32-45). Almost right after the disciples’ failure at exorcism (9:14-29), we hear of another successful exorcist whom they try to exclude but Jesus gladly embraces (9:38-41). Immediately before Judas makes his deal to betray Jesus for money (14:10-12), we read of an unnamed woman who anoints Jesus with a jar of expensive nard despite others’ objection (14:3-9). As the other disciples flee and deny Jesus (14:50-52, 66-72), Simon of Cyrene becomes the one who bears the cross (15:21), Joseph of Arimathea the one who provides the burial (15:42-46), and a group of women the ones who follow Jesus all the way to the tomb (15:40-41, 47; 16:1-2). In fact, Mark uses the same words to describe the “heart-conditions” of the disciples and those who oppose Jesus: their hearts are “hardened” (πεπωρωμένην, 3:5-6; 6:52; 8:17) and full of fear (φοβέω, 4:41; 5:15; 6:20; 9:32; 10:32; 11:18, 32; 12:12). Talking to his disciples, Mark’s Jesus makes a statement that also aptly describes their downfall: “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (πολλοὶ δὲ ἔσονται πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ [οἱ] ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι, 10:31; see also 9:35). Considering the special status already granted the Twelve in Paul’s

⁴² With the work of Kelber, Kingsbury, and Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*), I am taking it as established that one of the major themes of Mark is its critical representation of the disciples. My examples in this section are highly indebted to the work of these scholars.

epistles (for example, 1 Corinthians 15:5; and Galatians 1:17-19), the way Mark puts them among the “fall guys” of the Gospel is certainly in line with his promise of an apocalyptic rearrangement of power (8:38; 12:9; 12:36; 13:24-25; 14:61-62).⁴³

New Authority and Colonial Mimicry

Despite all of Mark's anti-authority and barrier-breaking rhetoric discussed above, one may question if Mark is concerned with breaking up the very makeup of authority, or merely the replacement of one authority by another. The way he contrasts the teaching and the authority of Jesus and the Jewish leaders in the first healing miracle (1:21-28) and the first controversy story (2:1-12) of the Gospel, seems to suggest that the issue for Mark has more to do with the categories of authority—whether it is new and substantial, or traditional and hollow—than its constitution. Sinfield, writing about King James' insistence to distinguish “a lawful good king” from “an usurping tyrant,” calls such a strategy a “characteristic of the ideology of absolutism” (*Faultlines*, 98-99). If inter(con)textualization helps bring out Mark's anti-colonial elements, it may also expose traces of—turning Bhabha's term (“Of Mimicry and Man”) on its head—“colonial mimicry.”⁴⁴ After all, Spivak has argued in “The Rani of Sirmur”

⁴³ The same dynamics can be at work regarding Mark's portrayal of that special inner circle among the Twelve. Each time Mark favors Peter, James, and John with a privileged proximity to Jesus that is not available to the other disciples, he follows it up with an episode that depicts them as samples of failure rather than models of faith. After their exclusive entry to witness Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from death in Jairus' house (5:35-43), the next time we see the inner circle alone with Jesus is the pericope surrounding Jesus' transfiguration (9:2-13), in which the threesome make not only the foolish suggestion to build monuments to commemorate what they see, but also show the extent of their foolishness on the way down the mountain—given what they have seen at Jairus' house—with their confusion over the meaning of resurrection. Likewise, after the “apocalyptic discourse,” with its repeated emphasis on watchfulness, is given to them (along with Andrew) as a private tutorial (13:3-37), they practically sleep through their next private session with Jesus at Gethsemane (14:32-42). In other parts of the Gospel, as we have seen, Mark has also made a point to specify their individual problems, like Peter's unwillingness to accept Jesus' first passion prediction (8:31-33), James and John's request for the next best seats in the kingdom (10:35-45), and Peter's thrice denial of Jesus (14:66-72).

⁴⁴ For Bhabha, “colonial mimicry” is a strategy of the colonizers that backfires, because it requires, by definition, a “partial sameness.” To use an accessible example from Renita Weems (60-66), slave-owners only presented the Bible to slaves in

that “colonial worlding” involves not only the construction of the colonizers, but also the potential internalization of that constructed world on the part of the colonized (see also Ashis Nandy).⁴⁵ Looking at the way Mark (1) attributes absolute authority to Jesus, (2) preserves the insider-outsider binarism, and (3) understands the nature of “legitimate” authority, I intend to argue that Mark has indeed internalized the imperialist ideology of his colonizers.

Jesus’ Absolute Authority

The authority of Mark’s Jesus is, first of all, closely related to the authority of the Hebrew scripture.⁴⁶ Time after time, Mark presents Jesus as one who can quote and expound scripture to justify his own teachings and actions, whether the issue at hand concerns the Sabbath (2:23–28), his practice of speaking in parables (4:10–12), ritual cleanliness (7:1–8), responsibility to parents (7:9–13), the acceptability of divorce (10:2–12), the assurance of eternal life (10:17–22), the operation of the temple (11:15–17), the credibility of resurrection (12:18–27), the first commandment (12:28–31), the relationship between David and the messiah (12:35–37), or the apocalypse (13:24–27).⁴⁷ As if

“partial” form for the purpose of “re-torm-ation”; slaves were not allowed to read the entire Bible by themselves, but could only hear “expositions” of certain passages by white ministers. This “partial” encounter, or command to mimicry, however, gives slaves the room to maneuver without being chained to what is literally written in the Bible. Using both Lacan and Derrida, however, Bhabha pursues his argument in terms of the “ambivalence” or “hybridity” of a colonizer’s psyche or a colonial text (for example, “The Other Question”; and “Signs”). What is central to Bhabha’s concern is, of course, the question of agency on the part of the colonized. As I emphasize agency, however, my “diasporic consciousness” also wants to push Bhabha’s emphasis on “the mutualities and negotiations across the colonial divide” (Moore-Gilbert, 116) to its logical conclusion. In other words, I want to explore also the “ambivalence” or the “hybridity” of an anti-colonial text. While Bhabha tends to present “mimicry” as mainly a “menace” (“Of Mimicry and Man,” 88) to the colonizer, I am using “mimicry” to refer to a reinscription or a duplication of colonial ideology by the colonized.

⁴⁵ According to Moore-Gilbert (86–87), this emphasis on a “decentered” or “impure” subject becomes, then, for Spivak also a bridge to deconstruct the exclusionary, and irresponsible understanding of biological or cultural determinism (for example, the view that “only women can talk about women,” or “only Indians can understand Indians”).

⁴⁶ Given Mark’s frequent allusions to Hebrew scripture, many of them stated with a formulaic introduction (for example, 1:2–3; 7:6–7; 11:17; 14:27), he seems to locate the source of truths and authorized actions outside of one’s self, although ironically many of his so-called “scriptural allusions” do not actually exist (for example, 1:2b; 14:21, 49).

⁴⁷ Scriptural allusions may, of course, be implicit or explicit. For example, I have

Mark is afraid that his readers may not come into agreement with Jesus, Mark is careful to point out that the way Jesus uses and interprets scripture is recognized as valid by the crowd (11:18; 12:37b) as well as by the scribe who questions him about the "first commandment" (12:32-33). Effectively silencing all his critics (12:34c), this scribal recognition, in effect, shows that Jesus is a sort of master scribe. At the same time, however, Mark indicates that this Jesus is much more than a master scribe who understands scripture; he is, in fact, its very fulfillment. In addition to Jesus' own references to scripture as a prophecy of his upcoming suffering and ultimate glory (9:12-23; 12:10-11; 13:26; 14:21; 14:27; 14:48-49; 14:62; 15:33), Mark also has "many" (πολλοί, 11:8) chanting the "hosanna chorus" at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (11:9-10), and thus identifying Jesus as the promised messiah. One must also not forget that at the broader narrative level (that of the implied author or narrator), this entire story about Jesus begins with a scriptural allusion to Isaiah (1:1-3).⁴⁸

This understanding that Jesus is the very fulfillment of Jewish scripture is perhaps best underscored by two scenes. The first is the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1-11), which asserts that Jesus, whose special status as "beloved son" (υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν, 12:6b) and "heir" (ὁ κληρονόμος, 12:7), will conclude the succession of servant-prophets sent by God to re-establish God's claim of ownership of the "vineyard." The other, Jesus' transfiguration (9:2-8), though sequentially earlier, may actually be more forceful in making this point. The transfigured Jesus is, first of all, greeted by Moses and Elijah, who personify the law and the prophets. After Peter rashly proposes to make "three tents" or "dwellings" (τρεῖς σκηνάς, 9:5d) for the conversation partners, three things happen: (1) a cloud overcomes them; (2) a heavenly voice is heard "repeating"⁴⁹ the announcement that

mentioned Kee's and Dewey's suggestion that Jesus' sea-crossing and feeding miracles are an implicit allusion to the Exodus event. For the purpose of demonstration, I have limited my list of examples here to Mark's explicit allusions only.

⁴⁸ It should be noted that the first part of this so-called "allusion" (1:2b) cannot be found in Isaiah. Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 239-248), has also argued for a minority position that this "allusion" refers specifically to Jesus rather than John the Baptizer. Since Mark's formulaic introduction to scriptural quotation ("as it is written" [καθὼς γέγραπται], 1:2a) appears at the heel of "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1:1), one does not have to take Tolbert's position to realize the relationship between Mark's Jesus and the Hebrew scripture.

⁴⁹ Sequentially speaking, of course, this announcement repeats the one given at Jesus' baptism (1:11b) rather than the one stated in the parable of the wicked tenants (12:6).

Jesus is God's "beloved son" (ὁ υἱός . . . ὁ ἀγαπητός, 9:7c), followed by the command, "listen to him" (ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ, 9:7d); and (3) Moses and Elijah disappear from the scene altogether. While this command to "listen" has been rightfully linked to the disciples' inability to take seriously Jesus' passion predictions within this "on-the-way" section of the Gospel (8:22–10:52) or, a little more specifically, their obsession with the dazzling sights associated with Jesus' transfiguration (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 206–207), the disappearance of Moses and Elijah after this command to "listen" may also signify what is wrong with Peter's proposal. Peter should not have placed Moses, Elijah and Jesus as equals.⁵⁰ Granted that Moses and Elijah are respectively the great law-giver and the great prophet of the Hebrew scripture, the son's appearance fulfills, and brings with him the authoritative interpretation of that tradition.⁵¹

The authority of Mark's Jesus, then, is ultimately dependent on his status as God's beloved son and heir. Mack cites Philipp Vielhauer to argue that Mark has effectively positioned one story at the beginning of the Gospel (Jesus' baptism, 1:9–11), one at the middle (Jesus' transfiguration, 9:2–8), and one at the end (Jesus' crucifixion, 15:33–40)

⁵⁰ This point is also clarified by the following verses that center on the Elijah figure (9:9–13). Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 208) has argued convincingly that Mark does two things to identify the Baptizer with Elijah: (1) he describes the Baptizer with the same words that the Hebrew scripture uses to describe Elijah (1:6; see also 2 Kings 1:8); (2) he emphasizes the same word "all" (πάντα and πάντες, 1:5a; πάντα, 9:12a) in describing the extent of both the Baptizer's and Elijah's work. What one still needs to remember, then, is how the Baptizer declares in the first chapter of the Gospel that he is not even worthy to bend down to untie Jesus' sandals (1:7).

⁵¹ In addition to what I have discussed regarding Jesus acting as the authoritative interpreter and adjudicator of cultic and other traditions of law in previous sections, Mark's representation of Jesus as a greater lawgiver can be seen in his claim to establish a "new" covenant with his blood (14:22–25). Let me also give a few examples of Jesus acting as a greater prophet whose words will remain even if heaven and earth do not (13:30–31). These examples will include his three passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34), the finding and the borrowing of a colt for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem (11:1–6), the preparation of the Passover meal (14:12–16), and the failure of the disciples at the time of Jesus' passion, including Peter's denials (14:17–21, 27–30, 50–51, 66–72). As Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 259) points out, presenting Jesus as such a master prophet gives Jesus an air of omniscience, and adds credibility to Jesus' predictions about the apocalypse or his parousia, which are not yet fulfilled within the Gospel (13:1–26; 14:28; 14:62; 16:7). While I see the transfiguration account as the episode that clearly establishes Jesus as the fulfillment of Hebrew scripture, Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 249), following Kee ("Function," 166), sees this establishment as being made in Mark 11, and understands, along with Perrin and Duling (250), the transfiguration as "proleptic of the parousia" (*Sowing the Gospel*, 204 n. 49).

to declare Jesus as God's son, and thus "superimpose a script of divine approval and involvement for all of . . . [Jesus'] activities" (285); but I think Mark's consummate touch in making Jesus' status special and his authority absolute is found in one little word that he tucks away in the parable of the wicked tenants to qualify this "beloved son": "the owner still had *one* other person, a beloved son" (ἔτι ἓνα εἶχεν, υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν, 12:6a and b; emphasis mine). In other words, there is no other heir other than Jesus; he is God's last authorized agent, God's one and only regent. This claim of singularity is, of course, an effective ideological weapon that leads to absolutism by allowing no comparison nor competition.⁵²

Some scholars are right in pointing out the distinction Mark makes between Jesus and God,⁵³ but the proximity between Jesus and God within the Gospel must also not be denied. This can be seen by the way Mark introduces his story as "the gospel of Jesus Christ" (τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1:1), but then has Jesus "proclaiming the gospel of God" (κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ, 1:14) in the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The fluidity of Jesus as proclaimer and proclaimed is further demonstrated by how a Galilean leper, despite Jesus' command to silence, goes around to "proclaim a lot" (κηρύσσειν πολλὰ, 1:45a) about how Jesus has healed him. Likewise, as Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 228 n. 95) observes, the Gerasenc demoniac, who is told by Jesus to report on what God has done for him, "departed . . . to proclaim in the Decapolis how much *Jesus* had done for him" (ἀπήλθεν . . . κηρύσσειν ἐν τῇ Δεκαπόλει ὅσα ἐποίησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, 5:20a; emphasis mine) instead. In various places of the Gospel, we find Mark's Jesus associating himself with the gospel and God with statements like "whoever is willing to lose his or her life *for my sake and for the sake of the gospel* will save it" (ὅς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσει τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σώσει αὐτήν, 8:35b; emphasis mine),

⁵² In addition to our previous discussion that Mark's Jesus is being presented as a greater scribe, a greater lawgiver and a greater prophet, the brief controversy about the relationship between David and the messiah (12:35–37) may be interpreted as an attempt to establish Jesus as also a greater king (see Trakatellis, 81).

⁵³ According to many, Mark has a so-called "low" christology because of its lack of a birth narrative. To adapt Gagnier's phrase about the working-class, the absence of a birth narrative makes Jesus "lacking differentiation from the undifferentiated masses" (141) until his baptism. For more specific examples, see Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 268 n. 55), who sees 13:32 as an indication of the distance between Jesus and God; or Waetjen (*Reordering of Power*, 168), who features 10:18 as the basis of his argument.

“whoever receives me receives not me but the one who sent me” (ὅς ἂν ἐμὲ δέχεται, οὐκ ἐμὲ δέχεται ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με, 9:37c and d), and “there is no one who has left a house or brothers or sisters or a mother or a father or children or fields *for my sake and for the sake of the gospel*, who will not receive a hundredfold in this age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields along with persecutions, and in the coming age eternal life” (οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν ὃς ἀφῆκεν οἰκίαν ἢ ἀδελφούς ἢ ἀδελφὰς ἢ μητέρα ἢ πατέρα ἢ τέκνα ἢ ἀγροὺς ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ ἕνεκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ἐὰν μὴ λάβῃ ἑκατονταπλασίονα νῦν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τοῦτω οἰκίας καὶ ἀδελφούς καὶ ἀδελφὰς καὶ μητέρας καὶ τέκνα καὶ ἀγροὺς μετὰ διωγμῶν, καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ ζῶν αἰώνιον, 10:29c-30; emphasis mine).

This status allows Jesus, as Mack observes in Mark’s many controversy stories (199, 203), to “author” his own assumptions, arguments and pronouncements that his opponents may not even share or accept. Rather than just being subjected to the authority of Hebrew scripture, Jesus becomes his own authority to give pronouncements that ask for decision without discussion.⁵⁴ For instance, in the controversy about fasting (2:18–22), Jesus simply declares “that from this time on, the meaning and purpose of fasting are defined, determined and dependant on the person of the Messiah-Bridegroom” (Trakatellis, 17), which is Jesus himself. In fact, his authority is so absolute that he has the freedom and flexibility to override the instructions that he himself gives to others to follow. For example, while Jesus chides the scribes for exploiting the livelihood of poor widows (12:40–44), asks a rich man to sell all he owns so that he can give the money to the poor (10:17–22), and sends the Twelve out on a mission like minimalists both in terms of personal belongings taken and charity sought (6:7–13), he allows an undistinguished woman to anoint him at a leper’s house with a jar of expensive nard that could have been sold for money to help the poor (14:3–9). He faults the Pharisees and the scribes for neglecting their parents with the excuse of the Corban offering (7:9–13); yet Jesus himself justifies his decision to ignore and shame his mother and siblings, whom he leaves standing outside calling for him, on the basis of a higher calling from God

⁵⁴ According to Jacob Neusner (115), this is shown in the controversy stories by the order as well as the number of arguments Mark gives to each side: the single argument Mark gives to the Jewish leaders initially is often countered by two arguments made by Jesus. For more discussions on Mark’s rhetorical constructions of these controversy stories, see Miriam Dean-Otting and V. Robbins; and Rod Parrott.

(3:31–35). Similarly, he forbids his disciples to exclude another exorcist because, he says, the exorcist is exorcizing in Jesus' name (9:38–40); at the same time, he reserves for himself the right to decide people's "proximity" to the kingdom (12:34), and to identify "false" prophets, even if they are also performing miracles in Jesus' name (13:21–22).

Jesus' status as God's *only* son and heir in Mark's Gospel seems to result in yet another hierarchical community structure. Despite the familial terms we have seen Mark use to describe the community of Jesus, Jesus' family, like most families on earth, is not devoid of its own pecking order. Alongside his language of brotherly and sisterly relations, we also find within Mark's Gospel the language of hierarchy that seems to undercut his egalitarian ideals. For instance, the word "authority" (ἐξουσία) is found again at the end of the "apocalyptic discourse" (13:34–37), when Jesus describes his household (τὴν οἰκίαν, 13:34a) in terms of a "lord" (Jesus himself [ὁ κύριος τῆς οἰκίας, 13:35a]) who "authorizes" (δὸς . . . τὴν ἐξουσίαν, 13:34a) his "servants" (τοῖς δούλοις, 13:34a) and "commands" (ἐνετείλατο, 13:34b) his "doorkeeper" (τῷ θυρωρῷ, 13:34c) to various tasks before he goes on a trip. Since the parable begins and concludes with the warning that one should stay alert and awake (13:32, 35–37), the imagery is that of an institution where vertical structure and the threat of punishment are all accepted modes of operation.⁵⁵ Jesus is at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of his household, just as the Gentile or Roman rulers are at the pinnacle of their hierarchy of power, "lord-ing over" (κατακυριεύουσιν, 10:42b) and "exercising authority over" (κατεξουσιάζουσιν, 10:42b) those who rank below them. Although Mark's Jesus forbids his disciples to treat each other in this manner and sets himself up as the model of a different way of relating (10:43–45), this is the kind of language that Mark uses to describe Jesus' interaction with his disciples. When Jesus sends the Twelve out on their mission, Jesus also "authorized" (ἐδίδου . . . ἐξουσίαν, 6:7c) and "ordered" (παρήγγειλεν, 6:8a) his disciples (see also 3:14–15); and as they get ready to move towards Jerusalem, Jesus also "commanded" (διεστέλλετο, 8:15a) the disciples to watch out for the

⁵⁵ Regarding this parable, Juell makes the statement that "the use of institutional imagery is unmistakable" (87). Juell goes on, however, to use this parable to pursue his argument that the church was already a settled institution at the time of Mark's writing, and that Mark is concerned with the church's complacency rather than its persecution.

“heaven” (τῆς ζύμης, 8:15) or influence of the Jewish authorities. Jesus, as the “lord” of his household (ὁ κύριος τῆς οἰκίας, 13:35a) or the “shepherd” of his flock (ποιμένα, 6:34; 14:27), teaches and tells his disciples—or his servants, his sheep—what they should do and how they should live. Why? Because, after all, he is not just “another servant” (ἄλλον δοῦλον, 12:4a) sent by God, he is God’s only “son” (υἱόν, 12:6b) and “heir” (κληρονόμος, 12:7), whose sandals John the Baptizer is not even worthy to bend down to untie (1:7). No matter what imagery Mark uses, Mark is quite explicit that while there may not be any “next best” seats for James and John in the kingdom, there is a throne that belongs to Jesus and Jesus alone.⁵⁶

With Jesus on the throne, his disciples are often reduced to, borrowing Brantlinger’s phrase for colored characters in British literature, “sidekick” roles, as the loyal satellites—virtually personified colonies” (*Rule*, 57) of the messiah. To keep a safe distance between himself and the “maddening crowd,” Jesus tells the disciples to go and get a boat for him to teach in (3:9). As the disciples strain at the oars, Jesus is taking a nap at the stern (4:38). When there are miraculous feedings to be performed, the disciples are the ones who assume the ushering role of seating people, the table-waiting role of distributing food, and the janitorial role of picking up crumbs (6:39, 41, 43; 8:6–8; see also 8:19–20). In the latter part of the Gospel, they continue to act as Jesus’ “gophers”; they are sent by Jesus to go for Bartimaeus (10:49), to go for the colt in the next village (11:1–7), and to go for the Passover preparation in the city (14:12–16). As Catherine Hall observes (243–244), “apprenticeship” (or Mark’s “discipleship”) is often just another name for “slavery” (or Mark’s “servitude”) in human history. While Mark faults the disciples for

⁵⁶ Of course, there are those commentators who are so excited by Mark’s language of equality that they do not make any mention of this duplication of hierarchical ideology within Mark’s Gospel; see, for example, Belo, 261–262. While Waetjen acknowledges that the messiah or Christ title is associated with a royal ideology that is “essentially elitist” and vertical in structure, he insists, in the same breath, that Mark’s Jesus is establishing a community that has an “essentially egalitarian” structure (*Reordering of Power*, 144–145; see also 97). Likewise, Hamerton-Kelly admits that Jesus, as “master,” is set apart from the disciples, but he also follows that up by qualifying Jesus’ authority over his disciples as only “informal” (73–74; see also 111). Perhaps because of his sensitivity to the menace of the British monarchy, it is the Canadian literary critic Frye (87–88, 91, 99–101) who actually devotes several pages to wrestling with the royal and loyal ideology that permeates the New Testament, although he, like the New Testament scholars cited above, ends up denying the potential danger of the New Testament writings.

their hard heads and fearful hearts, and frowns at any possible inequality among them, he never questions the different and unequal status between Jesus and the disciples.

Current studies on colonial discourse have alerted us to the realization that even language of the family may encode oppressive and dominating relations (for example, Achebe, "Image," 7-8; C. Hall, 260-261). One may notice that the word "father" is conspicuously absent in Jesus' definition of the new family (3:33-35). When Jesus talks to his disciples about sacrifices involved in following him (10:28-30), he sort of reiterates this idea of a new family by promising to replace every sacrifice by a "hundredfold" (ἐκατονταπλάσιονα, 10:30a): houses (οἰκίας, 10:29c, 30a), brothers (ἀδελφοὺς, 10:29c, 30a), sisters (ἀδελφάς, 10:29c, 30a), mothers (μητέρας, 10:29c, 30a), children (τέκνα, 10:29c, 30a), and fields (ἀγροὺς, 10:29c, 30a). Every single sacrifice brings an overabundant return except "father" (πατέρα, 10:29c), which is explicitly stated as a possible loss but also noticeably left out in the list of promised reward. Before we equate this curious absence and disappearance of "father" with the dismantling of authority or hierarchy, we must keep a couple of thoughts in mind. First, Mark's Jesus reintroduces an authoritative "father" figure for both himself and his disciples in the person of God, who has the last say on honor and shame (8:38), on forgiveness (11:25), on the time of the apocalypse (13:32), and on what happens and does not happen (14:36). Second, even if doing God's will makes one a mother or a sibling of Jesus, one must remember that within Mark's Gospel, God's will is arbitrated by and fulfilled in Jesus, the "beloved son" (υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν, 1:11; 9:7; 12:6b) and "heir" (ὁ κληρονόμος, 12:7) of God. Jesus' new definition of "family" does not automatically eliminate the interplay of power and subordination; quite to the contrary, power always resides with the one who has the authority to define.

"Children" is another familial term that crops up in Mark's Gospel once in a while. According to Mark's Jesus, his followers should welcome and incorporate "children" (παιδίον, 9:36-37) in their midst, and, at the same time, being "child-like" is "the disposition necessary for entry and continuing participation" (Horsley, "Kingdom," 421) in Jesus' community (10:13-16, particularly verse 15). In other places, we find Mark's Jesus referring to his disciples as "the sons of the bridal party" (οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος, 2:19b), and Jewish people as "children" (τέκνα, 7:27b and c). Once, in the verses immediately preceding the discussion on sacrifice mentioned above, Jesus addresses

his disciples directly as “children” (τέκνα, 10:24). Even if one understands “children” as a symbol for something else (like those who occupy a marginal position in society), infantilization is still an insulting form of patronization at best, and an extreme form of victimization at worst (see Nandy, 11–18).

Because of Jesus’ unique and authoritative status, those who criticize him are “guilty of an eternal sin” (ἔνοχος . . . αἰώνιου ἁμαρτήματα, 3:29b). Similarly, the disciples are instructed by Jesus that they are to demonstrate formally their rejection of those who reject them in their mission (6:10–11). When a disciple, Peter, rejects Jesus’ first passion prediction, Peter instantly becomes “Satan” (Σατανᾶ, 8:33c), which is defined as one who has his or her mind on “human” rather than “divine” things (8:33d). Judging from the immediate literary context of Jesus and Peter’s interaction (8:31–33), and from Mark’s presentation of Jesus as God’s son and heir, and thus the authoritative interpreter of God’s will, it may be accurate to conclude that “Satan” becomes anyone who does not share the mind, or obey the thoughts of Mark’s Jesus.⁵⁷ Not only do these crude methods of polarization further fuel the absolute authority of Mark’s Jesus,⁵⁸ they also lead to a duplication of the insider-outsider binarism.

⁵⁷ This Markan emphasis on obedience and loyalty is also reflected in Jesus’ remark that “if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand” (ἐὰν οἰκία ἐφ’ ἑαυτὴν μερισθῇ, οὐ δύνησεται ἡ οἰκία ἐκείνη σταθῆναι, 3:25). Mark’s negative portrayal of the disciples, however, does not only disappoint Jesus within the Gospel narrative, it may also be disappointing to those who read the Gospel, and as a result, spur the readers onto greater obedience and faithfulness to the person and mission of Jesus (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 224). In light of Mark’s duplication of colonial ideology, its rhetorical and emotional power may be related to Stewart’s argument (*On Longing*, 70–103) that when an anti-hegemonic movement turns hegemonic, it often involves “gigantic” emotions of obedience, loyalty, and faithfulness. Or, as Brantlinger writes, “At the heart of all authoritarian politics lies the desire to abolish dialogue (particularly the language of others), to use words strictly in the imperative mode, to call forth acts of heroism and devotion. This desire seeks to subject ‘every possible language, every future language, to the actual sovereignty of [a] unique Discourse which no one, perhaps, will be able to hear’” (*Rule*, 57; see also Bakhtin’s consistent characterization of such monologic, authoritative, and obedience-imposing language as “dead” language in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 259–422). I am also reminded of a comment by an anonymous Vietnamese worker: “A society that imposes on its people a single way of thinking, a single way of perceiving life, cannot be a human society” (cited in Trinh, *Framer*, 51). Maybe that is why Mark’s Jesus, in response to the Sadducees’ question, likens resurrection life (or life after the parousia?) to being angels in heaven (12:25), whose existence, as far as we can tell from the Gospel, is limited to serving Jesus (1:13c) and being on call to do his bidding (13:26–27, 32).

⁵⁸ One may say that Mark’s Jesus, being surrounded by “erroneous disciples”

The Binarism Remains

As the above episodes intimate, Mark's Gospel operates on a rather straightforward equation: those who respond favorably to Jesus, the authoritative interpreter and fulfillment of God's will, are "in," and those who do not are "out" (8:38). Granted that, as we have discussed, (1) this new criterion is opened to people of all hereditary and ethnicity, and (2) the stories of the disciples and the "other exorcist" show that one's status as an "insider" may involve a few twists of surprise, understanding and following Jesus is still a prerequisite for inclusion.⁵⁹ The result, therefore, is not inclusiveness, but the validation of a new criterion that is based on one's response to Jesus rather than other conventional measures. For example, what if that "other exorcist" is exorcizing in someone other than Jesus' name? Will there still be any question about his or her exclusion?

Mark's duplication of the insider-outsider binarism also involves violent destruction of those "outside" when the "ins" and "outs" become clear and absolute at Jesus' parousia. We have seen already how, with Jesus reappearing in power and in judgment (8:38-9:1; 12:9; 12:36; 13:26; 14:61-62), the parousia will bring about a realignment of socio-political power and the full establishment of God's reign, how the "wicked" authorities will be destroyed, and the temple built by "indiscriminating builders" dismantled. In other words, the "outsiders" who "ousted" Jesus will, in turn, be completely "ousted." As the following statement from the Gospel shows, Mark actually has in mind something worse than a "tit-for-tat" policy: "What measure you measure with, it will be measured against you, *with added proportion*"

and "evil opponents," appears much like Brantlinger's description of a prototypical colonial hero or missionary who encounters both "amusing" and "dangerous" obstacles: lesser natives who need to be taught and demonic savages who need to be overcome (*Rule*, 181). Like these figures, the fact that Jesus ends up being killed does not diminish, but exaggerate his stature.

⁵⁹ Notice that the insider-outsider binarism and the hierarchical subordination mentioned earlier often go hand in hand. Instead of demonstrating inclusiveness, the ironic change of the disciples from privileged insider to pitiful outsider, for example, may function to create a sense of vulnerability that helps "insiders" stay inside. Various scholars have pointed out the repeated Markan emphasis on to "beware" and be "watchful" (8:15; 13:5, 9, 23, 33, 35, 37; 14:34, 37-38; for example, Kee, *Community*, 75, 159-160; and Mack, 330). Whether it is through warnings of Satan, persecution, selfish desire for wealth and power (4:15-19), false prophets (13:5-6, 21-22), or the uncertainty of the final hour (13:32-37), I agree with Wactjen (*Reordering of Power*, 201) that Mark's Gospel seems to foster an identity or subjectivity that is insecure and vulnerable.

(ἐν ᾧ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε μετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν καὶ προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν, 4:24c; emphasis mine).⁶⁰ The horror of this “interest-incurring” repayment of violence is reflected, for instance, in Jesus’ comment regarding his betrayer that “it would have been better for that man if he had not been born” (καλὸν αὐτῷ εἰ οὐκ ἐγεννήθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος, 14:21c). Elsewhere, he talks about his eschatological judgment as an experience that is worse than drowning and mutilation, for it involves the torture of “never-dying” worms and “ever-burning” fire (10:42–48).

Presenting an all-authoritative Jesus who will eventually annihilate all opponents and all other authorities, Mark’s utopian, or dystopian, vision, in effect, duplicates the colonial (non)choice of “serve-or-be-destroyed” (Said, *Culture*, 168; see also 80). This (non)choice is, in turn, based on another colonial rationalization that Mark shares; namely that certain people have proven to be too barbaric, too evil or too underdeveloped to be given autonomy, or even the right to live.⁶¹ Despite the Gospel’s invocation of the Deity and its rhetoric that polarizes things divine and human (8:33; 11:30), it, like most human power systems, promotes “a hierarchical, punitive, and tyrannical concept of ruler and ruled, while claiming that it was all for the best” (Sinfield, *Faultlines*, 167).⁶²

Authority as Power

Mark’s politics of parousia supports the use of power, then, at the same time as it is used to express dissatisfaction with the present political power. Actually, power is also a word that would nicely

⁶⁰ For scholars who insist that Mark has moved beyond the repayment of violence with violence, see Hamerton-Kelly, 27, 31–32, 40; Waetjen, *Reordering of Power*, 78; and most recently, Robert Beck. In contrast, see Mendel (39–43), who argues that Mark, like Revelation, depicts an apocalyptic vision that is inherently violent. My interpretation also differs from Trakatellis’ (21), which argues that Jesus’ death on the cross is sufficient to prevent the Gospel from ending up in some kind of triumphalism.

⁶¹ This repetitive violence in Mark seems nothing more than a new cycle of neo-colonial rule, and it becomes more stark in light of the recent formation of the controversial Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, which aims to chart a future that would include all, even those who have participated in the crimes and atrocities of apartheid.

⁶² Various critics like Fanon (*Wretched*, 88, 93–95) and Kristeva (“Women’s Time,” 479) have commented on and expressed regret over this violent kind of “colonial mimicry” by anti-colonial and counter-cultural communities. While Fanon explains this mimicry of vicious violence in terms of the “Manichaeism” of the colonial world, Kristeva does so by using Girard’s theory on ritual scapegoating. Contrary

summarize how Mark understands and presents Jesus' authority (Mack, 170, 205–206, 234–242; and Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 135–136). Although the word "authority" (ἐξουσία) is first used in association with Jesus' first public teaching (1:21–22), what we really find in that pericope is not the content of Jesus' teaching but the account of Jesus' first healing miracle (1:23–26). Immediately after Jesus has successfully exorcized the "unclean spirit" (πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ, 1:23a) from the man, Mark has all the people in the synagogue who witness the miracle echo in amazement how Jesus' teaching is coupled with authority (1:27c and d). Yet again, the people's statement does not contain any recapitulation of what Jesus teaches; instead, there is a reiteration of the exorcism or healing miracle ("he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" [καὶ τοῖς πνεύμασι τοῖς ἀκαθαρίτοις ἐπιτάσσει, καὶ ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ], 1:27e).

Three observations can be made from the above pericope. First, Mark makes Jesus' teaching inseparable from Jesus' miracles; the (unknown) content of Jesus' teaching is known by his ability to heal, or his command over unclean spirits. Second, that power to perform miracles, or the ability to have his commands obeyed is understood to be Jesus' authority. Third, concluding from the above, what Jesus has to teach is his power to do miracles. In other words, his message is his authority.

Mark restates these same points in another pericope that occupies a strategic location within the Gospel. The controversy story about Jesus healing a paralytic (2:1–12) is the last of a series of four healing stories that introduce Jesus' public ministry (1:21–2:12), and the first of a series of five controversy stories that feature Jesus' conflict with the Jewish authorities (2:1–3:6). Like the pericope concerning the healing of the man with the unclean spirit, Mark ties Jesus' healing of the paralytic together with Jesus' teaching, the content of which may be muddled at first glance. The unspoken questions of the scribes (2:6–7) and the ensuing response from Jesus make it clear

to Hamerton-Kelly, who takes Jesus as the only scapegoat being sacrificed in the Gospel of Mark, I think there is evidence to suggest that Mark is guilty of duplicating the scapegoating mechanism in his promised expulsion of the "wicked tenants," which may, in turn, involve yet another level of "scapegoating" (charging Jewish authorities for the evil of Roman colonialists) within Mark's narrative. I am afraid the way Hamerton-Kelly presents the Christian gospel as a necessary corrective to the scapegoating violence that the Hebrew scripture "essentially disguises" (2–3) is also guilty of anti-Jewish implications.

that the controversy, or the point that Jesus wants to teach or get across is his authority—more specifically, his authority to forgive sins (2:5–8). To prove his authority, Jesus performs his miracle-working power. He gives the paralytic a “three-point” command: the paralytic is to stand, pick up his mat and walk home. To the amazement of all, his command is obeyed point by point (2:9–12).⁶³

This Markan understanding of authority as power can also be seen in other miracle and controversy stories, where, for example, Jesus overpowers death (5:35–43) and nature (4:35–41; 6:45–51)⁶⁴ until people say “he has done all things well” (καλῶς πάντα πεποίηκεν, 7:37b), or overwhelms his challengers until “no one dared to ask him any question any more” (οὐδεὶς οὐκέτι ἐτόλμα αὐτὸν ἐπεράτῃσαι, 12:34b). Although it works in opposite directions, this same understanding (authority as power) underlies both the Baptizer’s deference to Jesus and the Nazarenes’ rejection of him. The Baptizer’s statement that he is not worthy to untie Jesus’ sandals (1:7c) is sandwiched by two statements about Jesus’ power: Jesus’ superior strength (1:7b), and Jesus’ baptism with the Holy Spirit (1:8). On the other hand, the Nazarenes are so convinced of Jesus’ humble family background (6:2–3) that they conclude that Jesus’ miracles must not be real, because the same assumption, put in negative terms, means that people without authority do not have real power.

Even though (1) not everybody responds, as Mark implies one should, in amazement, attention and silent obedience,⁶⁵ and (2) the

⁶³ One may further argue that similar points about Jesus’ teaching, miracles, and authority are made within the series of healing stories (1:21–2:12) and the series of controversy stories (2:1–3:6), both of which involves the healing of the paralytic (2:1–12). A brief summary account of Jesus preaching and exorcizing throughout Galilee (1:35–39) is inserted right in the middle of the series of four healing stories, with two healing stories before (the healing of the man with the unclean spirit, 1:21–28; and the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law, 1:29–34), and two healing stories after it (the healing of the leper, 1:40–45; and the healing of the paralytic, 2:1–12). Somewhat similarly, the series of controversies is made up of a conflict story that involves a healing in the beginning (the healing of the paralytic, 2:1–12), three conflict stories that feature rhetorical arguments instead of miraculous cures (the question of eating with tax-collectors, 2:13–17; the question about fasting, 2:18–22; and the question of plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath, 2:23–27), and another conflict story that involves a healing at the end (the healing of the man with a withered hand, 3:1–6). Both series also start with a story in which the word “authority” is specifically mentioned (1:22b, 27d; 2:10).

⁶⁴ Trakettis further argues for the christological significance of having the “sea” obey Jesus (4:41) by alluding to ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings, in which the sea is often “a menacing entity from which came terror and monstrous beings” (30).

⁶⁵ These emphases are brought out by the repeated occurrence of words like

faithlessness of the disciples and the hostility of the Jewish authorities leave Jesus dying alone on a Roman cross, Mark's understanding of Jesus and of authority remain the same. In fact, Mark's understanding of authority as power becomes obvious in the dramatic events associated with the parousia. According to Mark, the parousia is God's ultimate show of force (and authority) through Jesus. As we have seen, this event, which is often associated with the word "power" (δύναμις, 9:1; 13:26; 14:61-62), will right all wrongs with the annihilation of the "wicked." I, for one, tend to think that Jesus' resurrection and return would be enough to undo his murder literally and establish his special place. But for Mark, such a scenario, which may solicit from some a somewhat contrite response similar to Herod's when he thinks John the Baptizer has come back to life in the person of Jesus (6:14), is not enough of a demonstration of authority. Authority is (over)power(ing); and it demands the submission of everybody, and thus also the annihilation of those who do not submit. In other words, vindication must become vindictive. The problem is that by defeating power with more power, Mark is, in the final analysis, no different from the "might-is-right" ideology that has led to colonialism, imperialism, and various forms of suffering and oppression.⁶⁶ Mark's Jesus may have replaced the "wicked" Jewish-Roman power, but the tyrannical, exclusionary, and coercive politics goes on.⁶⁷

"amaze" (1:27; 2:12; 6:2, 51; 9:15; 10:32; 12:17), "hear" (4:3, 9, 23-24; 8:18; 9:7), "obey" (1:27; 4:41), and "follow" (1:17-18; 2:14-15; 3:7; 6:1; 8:34; 10:21, 28, 32, 52; 14:51, 54; 15:41), as well as the Markan commands to silence (1:25, 34, 43-44; 2:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9).

⁶⁶ As Samuel Fleischacker seeks to wrestle with "the moral, even epistemological validity" of authority in contemporary sensibilities, he is quick to assert that authority is illegitimate if it is ultimately a matter of power (84).

⁶⁷ One may actually question if Mark says anything revolutionary in his (colonial) subject construction. Many of Mark's themes can already be found in the famous Roman orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero's (106 B.C.E.-43 B.C.E.) prescriptive essay on Roman citizenship, including the denunciation and destruction of tyrannical authority (12, 16, 20-21, 29, 50, 81, 125), the problem of lust for money, power, and glory (12, 21, 31, 39, 47, 107-109, 132-133, 147-151), the protest against legalism and rigid interpretation of the laws (15), the occasional need to put aside one's family for a "greater good" (26, 70-71, 80-81, 131), the insistence that "good" authority exists and that we submit and obey its commands (7, 11-12, 55, 65, 85-86), and the exceptions and exemptions of all prescriptions for some uniquely "great" individuals (56, 65, 124, 125). I am indebted to Patte's suggestion that I further inter(con)textualize my reading of Mark with some Roman writings, and to Susan Ford Wiltshire's recommendation of Cicero's essay.

Summary

I have argued in this chapter, first of all, that a close reading of Mark's Gospel shows a strong polemic against the Jewish leaders. They are depicted by Mark, through their opposition to Jesus, as weak and dependent on human support. Worse, they are also wicked. Mark equates them with robbers, murderers, hypocrites, distortionists, usurpers of God, and persecutors of God's faithful; moreover, they are power-hungry, exploitive, Satanic, heartless, and deceitful. As a result, their authority is traditional and hollow.

Inter(con)textualized alongside the social text of Roman colonization, however, Mark's presentation of authority may take on an anti-colonial twist. The Romans within Mark's narrative are, like the Jewish leaders, "people-pleasers" and persecutors of God's followers. Their style of rulership is oppressive and authoritarian; and they are charged for murdering Jesus, which they do in collaboration with the Jewish leaders. Furthermore, there is room to suspect that Mark's harsh criticism of the Jewish authorities may be (out of self-preservation and/or self-hate) a "scapegoating" tactic.

Not only does Mark disapprove of those currently in power, he condemns the desire for power, and promises a return of the resurrected Jesus. This parousia will rearrange the present political power, and result in the destruction of all who have shamed or been ashamed of Jesus. Mark's apocalyptic understanding further leads him to denounce other traditional authorities like family, ethnicity, and ritual regulations.

While all this Markan assault on authority has a potential to intensify the tension between Mark's original readers and their existing colonial (dis)order, Mark's Gospel also contains traces of "colonial mimicry" that reinscribe colonial domination. Jesus, as God's son and heir, has absolute authority in interpreting and arbitrating God's will. One's response to this authorized revealer of God's will, then, becomes the new measure by which one's status within the old "insider-outsider" binarism is determined. Mark's politics of parousia remains a politics of power, because Mark still understands authority as the ability to have one's commands obeyed and followed, or the power to wipe out those who do not. Despite Mark's declaration of an apocalypse, what we have in the Gospel are recurring themes of "empire" like tyranny, boundary, and might.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUBJECTS OF AGENCY: WAITING TO BE SAVED, AND LIVING LIFE AS IT IS NECESSARY

Commenting on novel as a cultural forum of a bourgeois society, Said talks about how the experiences of the novelistic hero and heroine “reveal to them the limits of what they can aspire to, where they can go, what they can become” (*Culture*, 71). Granted that the Gospel of Mark comes from a society far more ancient than what Said has in mind, Said’s observation may still stimulate a line of inquiry that is relevant to our inter(con)textual investigation of Mark’s subject constructions. In Mark’s narrative world, can subjects of the Roman Empire choose and determine their own course of actions? How much room does Mark allow for colonial subjects to participate in the process of making history? To ask the question even more pointedly, do people functioning under the weight of Roman colonization have the agency to bring about positive socio-political change within Mark’s “good news”?¹

Jesus, God’s Agent in Action

As we have seen in the last chapter, the hero of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus, is God’s authorized agent to bring God’s kingdom into the world; or, as Mark puts it right after his baptism, he is “sent out” (ἐκβάλλει, 1:12) to confront Satan and bring down the Satanic kingdom (see

¹ As Nancy Armstrong correctly warns, the emphasis on agency can easily slide back into “a popular and sentimental version of the bourgeois self” (33). Armstrong’s warning, however, should be heeded alongside Spivak’s caution that preoccupation with a decentered subject may also “turn into precious posturing” (“Not Virgin Enough,” 175). Throughout this chapter, my reference to agency should be understood as an attempt to walk the admittedly very fine line between the autonomous and self-sufficient individual of liberal humanism and the indeterminate and powerless subject of poststructuralism. In fact, I will argue that the duplication of colonial ideology in Mark’s anti-colonial discourse is itself a strong argument against the coherent and autonomous subject of liberal humanism.

also 3:23-27). Mark has our protagonist arriving on the scene in a rather independent manner. There is no mention of his background except that he is “from Nazareth of Galilee” (ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, 1:9). Unlike his first disciples, we are given no family history nor work information about Jesus. Mark’s construction of Jesus as an independent individual continues in Jesus’ baptismal experience, when, despite the presence of John the Baptizer, God “adopts” Jesus with a vision that only Jesus can see, and a direct pronouncement that only Jesus can hear (1:9-11). What we find, then, is a visionary who seems to be free of any family or societal influence apart from God’s guidance. Such an emphasis is confirmed by Mark’s repeated references to Jesus’ habit of preparing or praying in solitude (1:12-13, 35; 6:45-46; 14:35-36, 39).

Mark’s Jesus begins his public ministry, preaching about God’s coming kingdom and calling for repentance and change, after the alarming note that John the Baptizer has been arrested (1:14-15). Although the Baptizer’s baptism of repentance and forgiveness has obviously resulted in more show than substance, there seem to be enough early clues from Mark that Jesus is a different kind of agent, and that he can very well make a difference that the Baptizer cannot. After all, Mark has already had the Baptizer clarify that Jesus is “stronger” (ἰσχυρότερος, 1:7b), because, as Jesus’ baptism confirms, Jesus can baptize people with the Holy Spirit rather than water (1:7-8). Mark also makes no reservation about showing off Jesus’ “strength” right from the start: after an account of how four fishermen leave their career or their family “immediately” (εὐθὺς, 1:18, 20) upon hearing Jesus’ call (1:16-20), Mark details four healing stories (1:21-2:12) that lead not only to Jesus’ instant stardom but also to people glorifying God (2:12), as well as five controversy stories (2:1-3:6),² in which Jesus so overwhelmingly defeats his opponents that they have to resort to the possibility of murder (3:6).

As Mark alerts us to the hard-heartedness and the murderous intent of the Jewish leaders, he continues to show a Jesus who is enlarging his mission. First, his influence is no longer limited to Galilee, because Mark says people are coming to Jesus “from Judea and from Jerusalem and from Idumea and beyond the Jordan and around Tyre

² As I have mentioned in the last chapter, the last healing account (2:1-12) in Mark’s initial series of healing stories is also a controversy story about Jesus’ authority to forgive sins.

and Sidon" (ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰδουμαίας καὶ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου καὶ περὶ Τύρον καὶ Σιδῶνα, 3:7c–8a). Second, Jesus is formally establishing a personal entourage who will also serve as his emissaries (3:13–19).

It is at the end of this roster of disciples that Mark hints at another obstacle to Jesus' mission. Besides the Jewish leaders, there is a traitor within by the name of Judas (3:19). As Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 99–101) suggests, this piece of information, given right before Jesus' own statement that divided kingdoms and divided households cannot stand (3:24–25), casts an ominous shadow over the future of Jesus' mission. On the other hand, Jesus' claim that Satan will not turn against Satan's own kingdom, and that exorcisms are not possible without the binding of Satan (3:23–27) seems to confirm that if Satan is a "strong man" (ἰσχυρός, 3:27), Jesus, with the presence of the Holy Spirit (1:8, 3:28–30), is "stronger" (ἰσχυρότερός, 1:7b), and he will be able to overcome all obstacles to fulfil his calling as God's authorized agent of change.

From "Hard Heads" to "Mission Impossible"

As we follow the narrative sequence of the Gospel, the external and internal threats that surface against Jesus in Mark 3 begin to loom larger and larger. The parable that opens Mark 4, the one that Mark's Jesus designates as the key required to unlock the mystery of all other parables (4:13), discloses that Jesus' word will not bring about any lasting difference in most people (4:14–20). Although this rather bleak outlook seems to be brightened by several statements that distinguish the disciples who are privileged to know from the vast number of outsiders who fail to understand or accept Jesus' message (4:11–12, 21–25, 33–34), as well as the ensuing parables about the growth of the kingdom (4:26–32), Jesus turns out to have his hands at once full and tied with the Twelve. For example, while Jesus calms a storm—one of those natural disasters that, according to Belsey, "mark[s] the limits of human mastery" (*Desire*, 27)—in the very next episode (4:35–39), he cannot help the disciples to overcome fear with faith or understand his identity (4:40–41). Originally called by Jesus, the "stronger one" (ὁ ἰσχυρότερος, 1:7a), with the authority to exorcize (3:14–15), the disciples turn out to be without strength (οὐκ ἴσχυσαν, 9:18d) to do the very thing they are called to

do (9:14–18). As we have discussed, all the private tutorials Jesus gives cannot transform the “hardened” and “fearful” heart-condition of the Twelve; in addition to Judas’ betrayal, the disciples end up fearing people (and thus denying and forsaking Jesus) rather than fishing for people as Jesus has intended (1:17).

Mark’s ironic twist on the development of the disciples, as well as his straightforward account of how Jesus is misunderstood and rejected by many (especially the authorities), weaken our impression of human agency in a colonial world. The way Jesus’ family, thinking that he has gone mad, goes out to restrain him (3:21) is really not too different in their disapproval of Jesus’ mission from, say, the scribes who come down from Jerusalem to accuse Jesus of demon possession (3:22). Likewise, he is rejected by the people at Gerasene (5:14–17) as well as his hometown folks at Nazareth (6:1–6a). The crowd that is attracted rather than affronted by his miracles turns out to be a fairweather group.³ In the passion narrative, we find them collaborating with the Jewish authorities to arrest and accuse Jesus (14:43, 55–59); later, under the influence of the chief priests, they choose to have Barabbas released and Jesus crucified (15:6–15).⁴

Concerning Jesus’ relationship with the authorities, what happens in Jerusalem is almost an exact replication of what happens in Galilee. While his words and deeds in Galilee result in the authorities first charging him of blasphemy (2:6–7), and then plotting to kill him

³ A clue of that may already be detected in 12:37, where the crowd is said to be hearing Jesus “gladly” (ἡδέως). The exact word has been used to describe Herod’s initial response to John the Baptizer (he hears the Baptizer “gladly” [ἡδέως], 6:20c), whom he later has beheaded. Both, of course, may also remind one of the parable of the sower, in which the “rocky soil” is said to receive the Word initially “with joy” (μετὰ χαρᾶς, 4:16b).

⁴ Note that I am not differentiating the crowd in Galilee from the crowd in Jerusalem, because (1) Mark makes it clear as early as 3:8 that the crowd is made up of people coming from Judea, Jerusalem, and various places; and (2) Mark’s statement about many women who have followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (15:40–41) seems to imply that the crowd does travel with Jesus from place to place (see also 3:7; 5:33–34; 10:46). While Mark specifies that the Jewish authorities are persecuting Jesus “because of jealousy” (διὰ φθόνον, 15:10), he gives no particular reason for the crowd’s decision to have Jesus crucified. I will admit that I am tempted, in light of my argument regarding agency and Hamerton-Kelly’s emphasis on scapegoating, to argue that the crowd decides to scapegoat Jesus because seeing Jesus tried before Pilate reminds them of something that they cannot stand; namely, their own powerlessness in front of the colonial power, as well as their inability to do anything about the murder of John the Baptizer, whom they all believe to be a true prophet (11:32d).

(3:6), his increasingly aggressive assault on the authorities in Jerusalem causes the authorities to resort to a vicious scheme immediately (12:12; 14:1),⁵ and then accuse him of blasphemy (14:63–64). The major difference is, of course, what remains a plot in Galilee becomes a reality in Jerusalem; Jesus is violently put to death.

It is one thing to realize that Mark's Jesus cannot do too much with the disciples (who are fearful dimwits) and the authorities (who are die-hard reactionaries), it is quite another to see that Jesus is also limited in what he can do with those he heals. The leper, whom Jesus dismisses with a "solemn caution" (ἐμβριμησάμενος, 1:43) that he not say anything about Jesus' role in his recovery (1:43–44), ends up dismissing Jesus' warning and "began to proclaim many things and spread the word" (ἤρξατο κηρύσσειν πολλὰ καὶ διαφημίζειν τὸν λόγον, 1:45a), and by doing so, severely inhibits Jesus' freedom of movement (1:45b, c and d). Similarly, those who bring a deaf man to Jesus in the Decapolis disregard Jesus' command to silence after the healing of their friend; in fact, the way Mark puts it seems to imply almost an intentional defiance on their part: "but the more he ordered them [to tell no one], the more exceedingly they proclaimed" (ὅσον δὲ αὐτοῖς διεστέλλετο, αὐτοὶ μᾶλλον περισσότερον ἐκήρυσσον, 7:36b and c).

About midway through the Gospel, we find Jesus succumbing to the reality that his mission is going to be a failure. On his way towards Jerusalem, this one who first appears as an independent and confident visionary with overpowering wisdom and might is suddenly talking about his own suffering and death as a "necessity" (δεῖ, 8:31; see also 9:31; 10:33–34). As Mark's Jesus explains it in the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–11), the stronghold against repentance and change is so tenacious that it surprises even God, who makes the fatal miscalculation that the beloved son would command a respect from the wicked tenants that the previous servants could not. Jesus' experiences and encounters with people have now led him to identify his own future with the past failure of the new Elijah, or John the Baptizer (9:12–13). Mark has already given us a complete

⁵ As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the confrontations between Jesus and the authorities in Galilee are generally initiated by the latter, who would challenge Jesus in the form of a verbal objection (2:16, 18, 24; 3:22; 7:1–5), or a silent disapproval (2:6–7; 3:1–2). In Jerusalem, not only does Jesus "cleanse" the temple without provocation (11:15–19), he also takes over the interrogator role towards the end of the controversy series (12:35–44).

rundown on how “they did to him [the Baptizer] what they wished” (ἐποίησαν αὐτῷ ὅσα ἤθελον, 9:13b): after a positive response that goes only skin deep, they have him “handed over” (παραδοθῆναι, 1:14), or arrested, for speaking out against the socio-politically powerful, and finally have him beheaded because of Herod’s whimsical promise (1:4–5, 14a; 6:14–29). Like the Baptizer, then, Jesus is “handed over” (παράδοται, 14:41e; παρέδωκαν, 15:1); he appears before the socio-politically powerful, and is crucified because the authority having jurisdiction over him does not have the courage to stand up against “people-pressure” (14:53–65; 15:1–15).⁶

While the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–11) succinctly shows that what Jesus experiences is basically a repetition of what many of God’s servants have previously gone through, the apocalyptic discourse (13:1–37) makes it clear that Jesus’ faithful should not expect to fare any better.⁷ Like Jesus, they will be “handed over”; they will be beaten, tried before the authorities, and even betrayed to death (13:9–13). After all, if the authorities of this world do not even allow God’s only beloved son to pass over death at a time when they are commemorating the gracious Passover of God (14:1), why will they be kinder or gentler to Jesus’ followers at any other time? This inevitability of failure, suffering and death is also confirmed by Jesus’ earlier announcement that to follow him, his would-be followers must be prepared to take up the cross and lose their lives (8:34–37). Many scholars (for example, Dewey, 482; and Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 197–198) have also suggested that Mark may be making the same point in a more subtle way when he “sandwiches” the account of the Baptizer’s murder (6:14–29) between Jesus’ sending the Twelve out for mission (6:7–13) and their subsequent return and reporting to Jesus (6:30). Being God’s agents for change may bring about a measure of initial success (6:12–13), but ultimately death and failure await those who follow Jesus on this path.

⁶ Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 202) suggests that the parallel between Jesus and the Baptizer is further insinuated by the way Mark prefaces Jesus’ first passion prediction with a survey of public opinion regarding Jesus’ identity that mirrors the one people have of the Baptizer (6:14c–16; 8:27–28).

⁷ In addition to the parallel between Jesus and the Baptizer, or the one between Herod and Pilate, Mark’s Gospel is full of other “double entries.” There are, for example, two stormy scenes on the lake (4:35–41; 6:45–52), two miraculous feedings (6:30–44; 8:1–10), and two openings of blinded eyes (8:22–26; 10:46–52). In light of our discussion about the ineffectiveness of human agency and the inevitability of human suffering in Mark, there is room for one to argue that these “dou-

Hindrances of Human Agency to Change

Despite the miracles and fanfare associated with Jesus' appearance as God's beloved son, Jesus cannot bring his disciples to understanding or those in power to repentance and change. In the end, the single most important action of his earthly life is negative rather than positive: he drinks his bitter cup, and let himself be crucified by his enemies. He breathes his last, and his mission fails. If anything, Jesus' death calls attention to the huge gap between vision and agency. What he envisions, he cannot implement. The opposing power is too strong, and this same helplessness will haunt his followers.

What reasons does Mark give to account for such a grim view of human agency? I think, Mark seems to understand change agents as solitary pilgrims. Although Mark's Jesus pictures a new family made up of those who do the will of God (3:31–35), and sends his disciples out in pairs (6:7), he lives and dies an isolated individual.⁸ Misunderstood by his own family (3:20–21), rejected by his own hometown (6:1–6), and misunderstood as well as rejected by his own disciples (4:41; 6:51; 8:14–21, 31–33; 9:32; 10:32; 14:10–11, 32–46, 51–52, 66–72),⁹ his last words in the Gospel are the lonesome ones he utters while dying on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ὁ θεός μου ὁ θεός μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με, 15:34). Tolbert talks about a Markan "bias on behalf of

bles" communicate a cyclical, or worse, a spiral view of history, in which events and experiences merely repeat themselves until God intervenes, and Jesus returns in authority and power. For a study on Mark's doubles or duality, see Frans Neirynck. Note also how Mark emphasizes the reality of death by duplicating almost every reference to Jesus' death in the passion narrative: "they crucify him" (σταυροῦσιν αὐτόν, 15:24a); "they crucified him" (ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν, 15:25); "he breathed his last" (ἐξέπνευσεν, 15:37); "how he breathed his last" (οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν, 15:39a); "he [Joseph] asked for the body of Jesus" (ἤτησατο τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 15:43c); "if he [Jesus] were already dead" (εἰ ἤδη τέθνηκεν, 15:44a); "if he [Jesus] was dead long ago" (εἰ πάλαι ἀπέθανεν, 15:44b); "he [Pilate] granted the corpse [of Jesus] to Joseph" (ἔδωκ' αὐτὸν τὸ πῶμα τῷ Ἰωσήφ, 15:45; see Trakatellis, 136).

⁸ His promise of a new family in 10:30 is not only neutralized by the immediate reference to persecution, but also by the warnings in the "apocalyptic discourse" that some followers will turn into false prophets (13:6, 21–23).

⁹ As Trakatellis (91) points out, Mark intensifies the terror of being betrayed or forsaken by one's own by having Jesus making four references to the fact that there is a traitor among them during the Last Supper: "one of you" (εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν, 14:18b); "one who is eating with me" (ὁ ἐσθίων μετ' ἐμοῦ, 14:18c); "one of the Twelve" (εἷς τῶν δώδεκα, 14:20b); and "one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me" (ὁ ἐμβαπτόμενος μετ' ἐμοῦ εἰς τὸ τρίβλιον, 14:20c).

individuals over against groups" (*Sowing the Gospel*, 256-257), while Hamerton-Kelly talks about a Markan faith that can be defined as "stepping out of the crowd" (90); both are referring to the way the faithful ones in Mark—like the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20), the woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years (6:25-34), or the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus at Bethany (14:3-9)—tend to come and go as lone rangers. In Mark's world, lasting change cannot be made because those who want change often find themselves isolated; or, as Jesus tells his disciples in the "apocalyptic discourse," treachery and betrayal are constant possibilities (13:5-6, 12, 21-22), and they will be hated by all (13:13a).¹⁰

In addition to isolation and alienation, Mark's emphasis on treachery and betrayal brings out another hindrance to change: the fickleness and unreliability of human beings. Mark's Gospel is full of such examples, but perhaps the best one has to do with John the Baptizer, who is suddenly arrested (1:14) after he has led "all" (πάντα & πάντες, 1:5), meaning everybody of Judea country and Jerusalem, to confession and a baptism of repentance (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 116). Later, this same Baptizer is unexpectedly beheaded by a king who has been protecting him and hearing him with delight since his arrest (6:14-29).

Mark seems to explain this human tendency to vacillate, and the general human inability to bring about change in terms of two different but closely related human emotions: the fear of loss, and the lust for gain. King Herod, for example, having made the impetuous promise that he would give his daughter whatever she asks, decides to go against his better judgment and grant her request for the Baptizer's head, because he is afraid of losing face in front of his guests (6:26). Likewise, Peter, having promised that he would rather die than deny Jesus (14:31a, b and c), ends up reversing his choice and denies Jesus, because he is afraid of losing his life (14:66-72). It is exactly the same fear that causes the other disciples to forget their vow of loyalty and bravery, and flee—one even resorts to

¹⁰ Note that Hamerton-Kelly (107) follows his definition of Markan faith with an adamant argument for the value of community in Mark. Judging from Jesus' calling of the disciples as well as his commissioning of them to preach and exorcize in pairs, I do not think there is any question that Mark sees community as an ideal; yet from the way he depicts Jesus' isolation during the passion, and his emphasis on the betrayal motif for both Jesus and his followers, community seems to be an unrealizable ideal in Mark's understanding.

stripping in order to flee (14:31d, 50–52). There is also the rich man, who leaves Jesus “grieving” (λυπούμενος, 10:22), because he is afraid of losing his wealth.

On the other hand, Judas offers to betray Jesus not to avoid a loss, but to attempt a gain. After the Jewish leaders promise him a monetary reward, the deal is made (14:10–11). Judas is not the only disciple whose want for gain has caused him to struggle with Jesus, and impede him from doing God’s will; while only James and John have the nerve to plead Jesus for the next best seats of his kingdom (10:35–37), all the disciples vie with each other for power and prominence (9:33–34; 10:41).

The division between a fear of loss and a lust for gain becomes murky when we talk about the authorities who bring about Jesus’ death. As we have mentioned, the decision on the part of Pilate, the Roman governor, “to satisfy the crowd” (τῷ ὄχλῳ τὸ ἱκανὸν ποιῆσαι, 15:15a) and have Jesus crucified, although he is aware of Jesus’ innocence and has tried to offer his release (15:6–10, 14a and b), reflects the unequal but unstable power relations of colonialism. The fact that he chooses what is politically expedient rather than what is morally ethical exposes his chief concern to preserve and/or enhance his own political career. The same can be said of the Jewish leaders who bring Jesus to Pilate with a variety of trumped-up charges. Mark already has Jesus disclosing and denouncing their obsession with glory and power (12:38–40); running the risk of overstating the point, Mark specifies that the Jewish leaders are persecuting and prosecuting Jesus “because of jealousy” (διὰ φθόνον, 15:10). Challenged by Jesus but unwilling to relinquish the power they have come to enjoy, and for which they have an insatiable appetite, they decide to get rid of him by deceit and violence. Or, putting it in terms of the parable of the wicked tenants, the wicked tenants murder the heir because (1) they do not want to lose any share of their produce (12:2); and (2) they are greedy for an inheritance that is not rightfully theirs (12:7).

Ultimately, I think Mark relegates the above problems, as well as Jesus’ failure, to the sorry state of the world. Recent scholarship has generally come to the consensus that Mark presents faith as a prerequisite rather than a product of miracles (for example, Paul J. Achtemeier, 134; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 135–137, 163–170, 180–183, 188; and Lamar Williamson, 21, 197). The “unbelief” (τὴν ἀπιστίαν, 6:6) of the Nazarenes, for example, clearly handicaps Jesus’ ability

to perform miracles (6:5a). More subtly, Mark has miracles occurring in decreasing number but with increasing complexity as the Gospel progresses with more and more references to people's resistance against Jesus.¹¹ Not surprisingly, then, when the Pharisees ask Jesus for a miracle not out of faith, but with the intention "to test him" (πειράζοντες αὐτόν, 8:11c), Jesus announces emphatically that "no sign will be given to this generation" (εἰ δοθήσεται τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ σημεῖον, 8:12d). Elsewhere, Mark's Jesus further delineates the problem of "this generation" by calling it an "unbelieving" or a "faithless" generation (γενεὰ ἄπιστος, 9:19b), as well as an "adulterous and sinful" generation (τῇ γενεᾷ . . . τῇ μοιχαλλίδι καὶ ἁμαρτωλῷ, 8:38a). One must realize at this point that Mark's understanding of agency is also tied up with his understanding of the apocalypse or the parousia of Jesus. As Dewey (471) reminds us, an apocalyptic worldview is one in which the present is still under the evil control of Satan. The opposition between Jesus' mission and Satanic rule is demonstrated by (1) the fact that the first thing Jesus does after his baptism or "adoption" by God is a forty-day encounter with Satan in the desert (1:12–13; see Mack, 286); and (2) Jesus starts his public ministry on both Jewish and Gentile soils with an exorcism (1:21–26; 5:1–13). Even if Jesus is able to "bind" this "strong man" in their initial encounter in the desert (3:27), Satan turns out to have enough strength left to devour all of God's change agents, including God's only beloved son.

These factors that work against Jesus and human agency have already been "disclosed" by Mark in the parable of the sower, which states that three quarters of those who encounter God's call will not make any genuine change (4:1–20).¹² According to Jesus' private

¹¹ There are at least eighteen accounts of and references to the mighty miracles of Jesus in the first eight chapters of Mark. That number drops to three after Jesus' first passion prediction (8:31). Two examples will suffice to highlight the increasing difficulty Jesus has in performing miracles around Mark 8: (1) even if we do not count the decreasing number of leftover baskets in light of its potential implication for Jewish-Gentile relations, there is no question that Jesus needs more food to feed less people in his second miraculous feeding (6:30–44; 8:1–10; note also that the way Mark's Jesus highlights these numerical differences between the two feedings in 8:14–21 may serve as a clue that the "leaven" of the Pharisees and Herod may be "unbelief," which is exactly what impedes the possibility of a miraculous sign that the Pharisees ask for in 8:11–13); and (2) Jesus fails to cure the blind man at Bethsaida with his first attempt, the man's sight is perfectly restored only after Jesus revises his "saliva-treatment" in his second try (8:22–26).

¹² Again, I am greatly indebted to Tolbert for pointing out, among many other

exposition of the parable to his disciples (if we may reverse his order), this futility is caused by three factors: the desire for wealth or other worldly things (4:18–19), the fear of difficulty and pain involved (4:16–17), and the sway of Satan (4:15). As Mark's Jesus declares immediately following that exposition, "For nothing is hidden, unless it is meant to be disclosed" (οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν κρυπτόν ἐὰν μὴ ἵνα φανερωθῇ, 4:22a). Having shown us the reasons why human agency for change is futile,¹³ he now proceeds to tell us how change will eventually come about. Mark's Gospel is confident that the kingdom of God, though temporarily hidden, will also be disclosed or become manifested in the future.

From Being Sent to Being Saved by God

The last two parables in Mark 4, one about an unidentified type of seed (4:26–29) and the other about the tiny mustard seed (4:30–32), promise that given time, despite an outward appearance that may look discouraging, the kingdom will come in its fullness. Since "earthly sinfulness has a supernatural cause" (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 48), and human effort by Jesus and any other agent has already been shown to be largely ineffective in Mark's earlier parable about the sower, the manifestation and the magnitude of God's future kingdom will have to be dependent on the Deity, who alone can get to the root of the problem. Accordingly, our first parable under consideration makes no remark of the sower's labor. The sower simply, almost carelessly, "throws" or "scatters" (βάλλῃ, 4:26b) the seed and

things, the significance of this parable and the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–11) in the plot development of Mark's Gospel. While she (*Sowing the Gospel*, 148–172) equates the "hard ground" with the Jewish leaders, the "rocky ground" with the disciples, and the "thorny ground" with Herod and the rich man, my own study of the Gospel has led me to conclude that her groupings may be more neatly packaged than what the text itself warrants. As I have already illustrated, both the Jewish leaders and the disciples have shown a desire for power, which in Tolbert's classification, would become "thorny ground." Furthermore, I do not agree with Tolbert's assessment that in Mark, "why some earth is productive and some not we ultimately do not know" (*Sowing the Gospel*, 163). The Markan reference given by Tolbert to support her statement, 4:27, has to do with the mystery of the automatic process by which the kingdom does come to fruition; as to "why" most people do not respond to Jesus, I do not think Mark has minced any words on that topic.

¹³ Note that Cicero also talks about the futility of human effort to struggle against "nature" and "immortal powers" in his essay on Roman citizenship (44–51, 53).

goes to sleep; without the sower's toil or know-how, "the ground bears fruit automatically" (αὐτομάτη ἡ γῆ καρποφορεῖ, 4:28a) until it is ripe for harvest. In the second parable, the sower is not even mentioned. The mustard seed, once sown, just germinates and grows until it "becomes greater than all the [other] vegetable plants" (γίνεται μείζον πάντων τῶν λαχάνων, 4:32b).

The inadequacy of human agency to bring about change, then, turns into the "dispensability" of human endeavor within the Gospel of Mark. What gets emphasized in the certainty of change is a mysterious and automatic process known only to, and done only by, God (Mack, 165, 331). As Mark's Jesus, commenting on the kingdom and the difficulty associated with it, reminds us, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (Παρὰ ἀνθρώποις ἀδύνατον ἀλλ' οὐ παρὰ θεῷ, πάντα γὰρ δυνατὰ παρὰ τῷ θεῷ, 10:27b and c; see also 14:36b and c). Mark, in a sense, verifies this very statement with the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–11). When it becomes clear that none of the owner's servants, not even the owner's only beloved son, can command the respect and collect the owner's due share of the produce from the wicked tenants, the only one who can act and do something about the presumably desperate situation is the owner. And Mark's Jesus does promise in the parable that the owner will show up, get rid of the wicked tenants, and place the vineyard under new management (12:9).¹⁴ This mighty act of God, coupled with the glorious parousia of Jesus and the salvation of the elect (8:38; 13:24–27), will usher in the new age, when Jesus' authority will be publicly recognized. The fact that Jesus, commenting on this direct divine intervention, stresses that only God knows the final day and the final hour (13:32) may be yet another indication that final change and deliverance are beyond the control of any human but solely in the hands of God.

With God being the single constructive actor in history, the human characters in Mark are no longer subjects or agents of positive change. As evidenced by the repeated failures of the prophets, the Baptizer, and even Jesus, human beings in Mark have no real capacity for

¹⁴ Despite God's miscalculation in the sending of the son, Mark's Gospel is confident that God is still in control, and that God can be trusted to make all things right. This is accomplished by Mark through Jesus' frequent allusions to scripture (7:6–7; 9:12–13; 11:17; 12:10–11; 14:21a, 27), and, by virtue of his status as God's beloved son, the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; 11:2–6; 14:13–20, 30).

turning history away from Satanic destruction and into a positive direction.¹⁵ Although the early part of the Gospel seems to emphasize how agents are sent to do God's work, that emphasis gradually gives way to how God will do what God's agents cannot do, as well as how God will save the faithful. For example, the Gospel starts with a "quote" from Hebrew scripture about God "sending" (ἀποσ-tάλλω, 1:2b) a messenger to prepare God's way; as soon as Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit immediately "sent out" (ἐκβάλλει, 1:12) Jesus to encounter Satan. Jesus, in turn, "sent out" (ἐξέβαλεν, 1:43) the cleansed leper, who ends up proclaiming the word despite Jesus' command to silence. Finally, there are two references to Jesus' program to "send" (ἀποστέλλει, 3:14c; ἀποστέλλειν, 6:7b) the disciples on mission trips. After the first passion prediction (8:31), however, there is only one genuine reference to God's "sending" program (9:37). Although the word "sent" appears numerous times in the parable of the wicked tenants (ἀπέστειλεν, 12:2a, 4, 5, 6), they are only employed to point out the futility of that "sending" program; not only do the wicked tenants beat and kill the agents sent by God, they also send them back, devoid of result, and sometimes of life (ἀπέστειλεν, 12:3; ἐξέβαλον, 12:8b).¹⁶ In contrast, the word "save" (σώζω), which appears only three times (3:4c; 5:23b, 34c) before Jesus' first passion prediction (8:31), turns up nine times (8:35a and b; 10:26b, 52c; 13:13b, 20b; 15:30, 31b and c) in the last eight chapters of the Gospel. Perhaps more importantly, almost every single one of these nine references to salvation highlights the impossibility of salvation through human effort and/or God's gracious power to save.¹⁷

¹⁵ Tolbert suggests that this futility is also typified by the fact that Jesus' last miracle in Mark (the cursing of the fig tree, 11:12-14, 20-21), is "one of destruction rather than growth" (*Sowing the Gospel*, 193).

¹⁶ There are actually four more times when the word "send" is used in the second half of Mark's Gospel. I have decided to exclude them because two of them have to do with Jesus sending the disciples for errands rather than mission (11:1; 14:12), one has to do with the sending of angels *after* the parousia, or God's direct intervention in history (13:27), and the last has to do with the sending of Pharisees on the part of the Jewish leaders to entrap Jesus (12:13).

¹⁷ Possible exceptions may include 8:35b, 10:52c, and 15:31b. Although grammatically, 8:35b, with "whoever" (ὅς δ' ἂν, 8:35b) as the subject of σώσει (indicative future active third person singular, 8:35b), may indicate one's ability to save one's own life by being willing to give up his or her life for Jesus and the gospel, its immediate literary context clearly shows that while salvation or damnation is related to one's attitude towards Jesus, this most important matter is not something that human beings can control or trade for (8:35a, 36-38). Jesus' comment in 10:52c that Bartimaeus has been "saved" by his faith is exactly the same one he makes

This emphasis on being saved (by God), as both Spivak ("Can the Subaltern Speak," 299–308) and Lata Mani (397–398) have pointed out regarding *sati* (the Hindu practice of widow burning), constructs human beings as objects who are acted upon rather than subjects who act.¹⁸ It is ironic that in a Gospel where—judging from the way Jesus' "adoption" by God is introduced, not with his family lineage, but with a scripture about preparing God's way and the Baptizer's call to repentance (1:1–8)—human lives are presented through intervention into history and public action rather than the bourgeois emphasis of privatized and psychological introspection,¹⁹ human beings actually have no original agency or original autonomy, except the choice to serve either of the true actors of history: God or Satan.²⁰ That choice, however, affects only individual destiny and has nothing to do with the course of history.²¹ In Mark, Satan's hold on this

to the hemorrhaging woman in 5:34c. Both (as well as 9:22–23), however, have to be evaluated in light of 11:22–24, which specifies that the one who has faith is not the real agent that makes things happen, the real agent is God, who may be moved to action by means of people's faith. Finally, however one may want to interpret the statement by the Jewish leaders that Jesus has saved others (15:31b), one must keep three thoughts in mind: (1) the statement is part of a taunt to emphasize Jesus' inability to save himself (15:31c); (2) Jesus' ability to "save" or "heal" others is dependent on the faith of the "healee" (6:1–6; 9:21–24), and ultimately on God; and (3) 15:31 creates an irony in that it is precisely by his failure, or his death that Jesus incites God to intervene in history, and thus *indirectly* brings about the salvation of others (12:6–9; 13:20, 26–27).

¹⁸ Admittedly, Spivak's treatment of this subject is far more complicated than I have presented here. For her, both British and Indian men objectify Indian widows by imputing to the widows a voice that feigns will and agency (for white men, this voice asks for help to deliver the brown women from brown men; for brown men, this voice represents voluntary consent to *sati*). For an excellent discussion of this important essay of Spivak, see Moore-Gilbert, 80–91.

¹⁹ These two ways of self-constitution is proposed by Foucault in the second volume of his *History of Sexuality (Use of Pleasure)*. Instead of reflecting what Foucault identifies as a Judeo-Christian system of internal scrutiny, however, Mark (at least in the beginning of the Gospel) seems to reflect what Foucault identifies as a classical Greek ethics of communal activities and public actions.

²⁰ We have, in the last chapter, argued that Mark reinscribes the insider-outsider binarism. Those who oppose or disagree with Jesus, like the Jewish leaders (1:23–24; 4:15) or Peter (8:32–33), are automatically associated with the devil. According to Belsey (*Subject*, 13), presenting human beings as locations and instruments of such a supernatural conflict will result in a "fragmented and fragmentary" subjectivity that is always in turmoil. In Mark, though, people can become quite firm in their association with Satan, as the example of the Jewish leaders clearly shows.

²¹ Relating earthly struggle in terms of cosmic forces does not necessarily remove human agency or carry damaging socio-political implications. The allegiance of human beings can be understood to be decisive to the outcome of the struggle between God and Satan, and Russell, for example, argues that Satan can be "a

world has proven to be so strong, and human agency so weak that God has determined to resort to a direct and violent intervention in the near future (9:1; 12:1–11). This intervention will bring salvation to some, and destruction to others; either way, human beings remain objects instead of subjects of agency.²²

The strong hold of Satan and the lack of human agency also mean that, in the present, the choice to serve God is a choice to suffering and martyrdom (8:34–38; 10:29–30, 39c and d; 13:9–23). Mark's Jesus is, of course, the perfect model of such a choice. Instead of struggling for anything original, he accepts his God-given identity as the "beloved son" (1:9–11), and is immediately "sent out" (ἐκβάλλει, 1:12) to encounter Satan in the desert; when it becomes obvious that his mission is doomed to fail, Jesus surrenders, once again, to the new course God has ordained (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; 14:32–42). It is only within these terms of acceptance and surrender that Mark's Jesus is able to act.²³ To borrow Belsey's words, Mark's Jesus is "free to choose to the extent that . . . [he is] free to acquiesce [to God]" (*Subject*, 192–193). He shows his resolve and his courage by making the trip to Jerusalem, and preparing the disciples on the way. When he gets into the city, he aggressively challenges the Jewish leaders in the temple, charging them of distortion,

reminder of the sociality of evil" (137). Notice that while Mark acknowledges the presence and the rule of Satan in the world, Mark does not blame all of the world's evil on Satan. For example, he refers to Satan's activities as well as human aches to protect and promote oneself as causes that hinder human agency to bring about positive change in the parable of the sower (4:14–19).

²² While Mark presents destruction as the only way to redistribute justice, the fact that he places that authority solely in God's hands when the ruling powers become unjust certainly carries implications for the issue of authority that we have dealt with in the previous chapter. Mark, in effect, implies a "three-story" hierarchy of authority—one that has God's authority on the top, followed by the sovereign's, and finally the subject's—within which redistribution of justice can only be performed from top to bottom, but not the other way around.

²³ Despite the impression of autonomy the verb "willing" or "choose" (θέλω, 1:40; θέλω, 1:41b) may communicate in Jesus' healing of the leper, one must remember that this choice that Jesus makes to heal is preceded by the fact that Jesus has been "chosen" by God at his baptism (1:9–11). Likewise, the scene at Gethsemane, by exposing Jesus' fear and struggle, clearly shows that Jesus' courage and strength during his trial and death are derived from his submission to God. It also establishes that prayer, whether it is for the moving of mountains (11:23) or the removal of suffering (14:36), is always conditioned upon God's will. In a strange way, this immensely important scene at Gethsemane, by detailing Jesus' submission to suffering as a decision, may also signify that the willingness to go through suffering and martyrdom is a means to re-install oneself as a subject in a colonial world where agency and control are often out of reach.

robbery, usurpation, and murder (11:15–19; 12:1–11). Whereas he knows that one of the Twelve will betray him, he makes no effort to prevent the betrayal from taking place except with what may, at most, function as an indirect verbal warning (14:17–21). In the same way, Jesus makes no attempt to resist his arrest, although someone with him does take a pretty good swing at it and chop off a capturer's ear (14:41d–49). When he is given the opportunities to defend himself before both the high priest and Pilate, he remains stoic and largely silent; and when he does speak, what he says serves to convict rather than acquit him (14:60–64; 15:2–5). Even when he is offered a mixed drink of alcohol and myrrh (something akin to a modern painkiller) on the cross, he has the strength to reject it, and endures the crucifixion without “watering down” any of its pain.²⁴ Jesus' strength lies in his willingness to endure the “necessity” (δεῖ, 8:31) of suffering and death with courage and loyalty. Maybe it is her demonstration of a similar “futile” or “fatalistic faithfulness” that prompts Jesus to place the unnamed woman at Bethany in such high regard (14:3–9). With no capacity to avert the violent death that awaits Jesus, she honors him by preparing his body for burial with a jar of expensive nard. Or, as Mark's Jesus puts it, what is memorable about this woman is the fact that “she did what she could” (ὃ ἔσχεν ἐποίησεν, 14:8a).²⁵

For Mark, suffering and death are the hallmarks of faithful discipleship. Judging from the way Mark's Jesus concludes his teaching on “servanthood leadership” with the example of how he sacrifices his life (10:43–45), one may gather that martyrdom does not only assure salvation (13:9–13), but that it is also the service that would make one “first” (πρῶτος, 10:44a) in the kingdom. Besides, suffering and death also “belong to the labor pains which Mother History must endure in order to give birth to the new creation” (Waetjen, *Reordering of Power*, 198; see also 13:5–8). I have quoted Waetjen's words

²⁴ Waetjen argues that Jesus' rejection of this drink is a reflection of his determination to remain fully conscious, and as such, it is an indication of Jesus' autonomy and freedom “to exercise a significant measure of self-determination” (*Reordering of Power*, 232–233). What Waetjen seems to have forgotten is at Gethsemane, Jesus has already reaffirmed his decision to give up his “autonomy” to God (14:35–36).

²⁵ Mark seems to have the same attitude toward the problem of poverty. When the onlookers suggest that the nard should be sold to help the poor rather than used to anoint Jesus, Jesus, without denying the pain of poverty, seems to imply that while we cannot ever eliminate the problem of poverty, we should show kindness to the poor whenever we can (14:4–7).

in full because they remind us that while human beings cannot defeat evil by their own labor and effort in Mark's Gospel, human sufferings (especially martyrdom of the faithful) constitute a form of induced labor that will move God to quicken the birth process of the "new world order."²⁶ The parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–11) claims that the beatings and killings of a succession of God's servants, and finally the murder of the heir compel God to do with force what God's agents cannot do with words. In the "apocalyptic discourse," Mark's Jesus plainly declares that God will mercifully shorten the days of suffering "because of the elect" (διὰ τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς, 13:20c).²⁷ In losing their lives, Jesus' followers do not only ensure for themselves the future reward of eternal life (8:34–9:1; 10:30b), they will also expedite the receiving of that reward.²⁸

²⁶ This is but one of several teachings in Mark that may "strengthen" his readers/hearers to endure suffering and death. Other teachings that may have similar effect include the numerous references to resurrection (5:35–43; 6:14–16; 8:31; 9:2–10, 31; 10:32–34; 12:18–27; 16:6), and the emphasis on fear as the opposite of faith (4:40–41; 5:15, 36; 6:50; 9:6, 32; 10:32; 16:8; see also Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 264). Having said that, I must point out that as Mark validates and encourages a courageous subject, its emphasis on judgment (8:38–9:1; 10:42–48; 12:9; 12:36; 13:24–26; 14:21, 61–62) also seems to assume a fearful subject who has to be frightened into faithfulness. Mark's "double-take" on fear, together with what we said regarding Mark's treatment of authority in the last chapter, may lead to a fragmented subject or contradictory subject positions.

²⁷ According to Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 293), this promise that God will mercifully shorten the time of suffering is already verified at Jesus' death. The textual evidence she provides includes: (1) Jesus' death happens almost immediately after Jesus questions God about his forsaken state (15:33–37); (2) it is the special, or speedy, manner in which Jesus dies that causes the Roman centurion to acknowledge Jesus as God's son (15:39); and (3) Pilate is shocked by how soon Jesus died (15:44–45). Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 265) further suggests that in Mark, the way to induce suffering, and thus the labor pain to expedite God's show of force, is inseparable from the retelling of the story of Jesus, since (1) Mark has already shown that Jesus' words and deeds stir up evil opposition that is determined to destroy him (3:6; 11:18; 12:12; 14:1, 55); and (2) Mark has Jesus announcing that the fullness of the kingdom "must" (δεῖ, 13:10) come after the proclamation of the gospel to all the nations. Following Tolbert's train of thought, this second use of "must" will also serve as a good explanation of the first use of "must" within the "apocalyptic discourse," where the inevitability of various sufferings and pains is presented as only the beginning of the birth process (13:5–8). God, who is merciful to shorten the birth pain (13:20), does not eliminate it completely because of another "necessity," the need to have the gospel proclaimed throughout the world (see also 14:9).

²⁸ The fact that the time of the apocalypse is flexible makes Mark's apocalyptic understanding seem less deterministic. One also has to remember that, according to the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–11), the death of the heir is not what God had originally planned; instead, this miscalculation turns out to be the straw that breaks the camel's back (see Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 262, 237–238). Of course,

Mark's Gospel suggests, then, that incapacity and suffering are essential components of colonial subjectivity. Despite Jesus' attempt to exorcize, heal and feed, the power of Satan, and thus the unbelief of the people, mean that incapacity and suffering will inevitably be part of life. To be a colonial subject is to be powerless and defenseless, being vulnerable to suffering, and to live daily in the shadow of death. In Mark, the agency of change belongs to God and is largely beyond the reach of human hands; even the promise that human suffering will accelerate the coming of the kingdom (13:19–20) is followed by the reminder that timing the end is an executive decision that only God can make (13:32).

Human Mobility and Human Autonomy

Using the word “must” (δεῖ) to refer to the suffering and death of Jesus (8:31), his predecessor(s) (9:11–13),²⁹ and his faithful followers (13:7; 13:10), Mark reminds me of the motif of “necessity” that S. C. Wong has recently theorized on the basis of the minority literature of Asian America. According to S. C. Wong (13, 33, 44), “necessity” emphasizes constraints, denies choice and consent, and creates a chain reaction of more and more sacrifices. Subscribing to what S. C. Wong calls “the dogma of necessity” (31), Jesus becomes one of its victim without protest;³⁰ and supposedly, so will his followers,

such flexibility must be placed alongside Mark's certainty that once God switches to the plan of direct intervention, the course of history is set, and God's victory is assured. Note also that Werblowsky (47) and Eliezer Schweid (63–65), in their separate study on Jewish messianism, have both identified three types of activism that can supposedly hasten the coming of the messiah, and thus the end of foreign domination: military activism, spiritual activism, and magical activism. Personally, I would place Mark under the rubric of spiritual activism, as long as it is understood that it is, like military or magical activism, also a form of political activism that may or may not be politically effective.

²⁹ Rigidly speaking, the word “must” (δεῖ) is used only to refer to Elijah, or John the Baptizer in 9:11–13. In light of the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–5), I am taking the liberty to extend the Baptizer's suffering to all the other agents that God has sent before him.

³⁰ Although my earlier discussion of Jesus' agency, or lack thereof, focuses on what happens after his first passion prediction (8:31), and, even more specifically, on Jesus' passion, there are indications that even before then, Jesus' mission already carries a tremendous burden that he simply bears in silence because of “necessity” (1:38). For example, Mark refers twice to the way the mission threatens Jesus' safety (he may be crushed by the pressing crowd, 3:9; 4:1: see also 5:31), and twice to the way it jeopardizes Jesus' health (he has to forgo food because of his pressing schedule, 3:20; 6:31).

if they are faithful. Answering Caren Kaplan's call for resistance critics to pay attention to the ideological importance of maps and geographies,³¹ S. C. Wong's investigation of "necessity" (118–165) also includes a study on the presentations of journeys and (im)mobility. As I have mentioned in the last chapter, most Markan scholars have outlined the Gospel in accordance with Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. Applying S. C. Wong's work on necessity and mobility, I will argue that Mark also depicts Jesus' movements as movements of necessity; and as such, it is entirely consistent with his construction of a colonial subject position that lacks agency.³²

In the beginning of Jesus' mission, he seems to have a clear sense and firm control of his direction. In a succession of rather rapid movements (1:14–34), Mark shows him preaching repentance in Galilee and proclaiming the imminence of God's kingdom, calling four disciples, and performing a number of exorcisms and healings in one Sabbath day at Capernaum. With the rising sun of a brand new day, Jesus, himself a rising star, is sought by his disciples, who, in turn, tell him that "all [in the city of Capernaum] are seeking you" (πάντες ζητοῦσίν σε, 1:37). In response, Jesus decides to leave this city that he has wrapped around his finger to preach in the adjoining towns, because, he declares, "I came out for this purpose" (εἰς τοῦτο . . . ἐξῆλθον, 1:38d). Although this statement seems to communicate autonomy and purpose, the word "came out" (ἐξῆλθον, 1:38d) takes us back to the happenings before Jesus "came" (ἦλθεν, 1:14) to Galilee. What we find is, of course, Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan (1:9–11), and, even more significantly, how the Holy Spirit "sent him out" (αὐτὸν ἐκβάλλει, 1:12) to encounter Satan in the desert. Not only does this extremely brief account establish Satan as the archrival of Jesus' mission, it also introduces an invisible force that may be piloting Jesus' every movement. Even if we put this thought aside for the moment, Mark dissipates the firm control of

³¹ As I am writing this sentence, I am anticipating a move to live in South Chicago. As part of that preparation, I just finished reading Mary Jacoby's article (14) on Jesse Jackson Jr., who points out how maps of Chicago always end at 55th Street, thus implying that the "notorious" Chicago South Side does not exist, does not matter, or should not be visited.

³² Although Hamerton-Kelly's interpretation of Mark favors space over time, he has commented on the importance of both time and space within a narrative (112–121). If we take my previous discussion on the Markan shift from being sent to being saved by God as one that focuses mainly on time, this section on mobility will have more to do with space. What I hope to show, then, is that both dimensions in Mark work together to produce a subject position that lacks agency.

direction that Jesus seems to intimate in 1:38 rather quickly and consistently. In the very next episode, for example, we already find Jesus' mobility hampered by a leper whom he heals; because of the free publicity, courtesy of the leper, Jesus has to stay in the outskirts rather than going into various towns like he has intended (1:45). When Jesus specifically asks to be taken across the lake to Gerasene, he has to turn right around and return to the other side because his demoniac-calming and swine-drowning miracle makes people nervous, and they ask him to leave (5:14–21a). When he is back on the other side, his trip to Jairus' house is unexpectedly interrupted by the faith of the hemorrhaging woman (5:21–35). After he finally finishes his business and leaves Jairus' home, he returns to his hometown (6:1–6). The unbelief of the Nazarenes, however, does not only block his miracle-working power, their jeers and contempt also seem to keep him away from home. For the remainder of the Gospel, there is no mention of Nazareth again.

Upon the disciples' return from mission, the gathering throngs cause Jesus to treat the disciples to a retreat (6:30–31). Even that plan, however, is interrupted. The desert place (ἐρημον τόπον, 6:32) they choose turns into a gathering place immediately upon their arrival. Instead of resting, Jesus and the disciples find themselves involved in another teaching session as well as another miraculous act (6:32–44).

If this double change of plans seems complicated, the next trip that Jesus and the disciples make seems even more puzzling. Immediately after the first miraculous feeding in the desert, Mark's Jesus has Bethsaida, a town across the lake, clearly set as his destination (6:45). Following a trip across the lake that is compounded by a natural storm and Jesus' supernatural "walking-on-water" stunt, Mark has them landing at Gennesaret rather than Bethsaida (6:53), which they do not reach until 8:22 after an extensive and (geographically speaking) senseless "detour" that takes them through Tyre (7:24), Sidon (7:31), the Decapolis (7:31), and Dalmanutha (8:10). Even within this "detour," of which Mark offers no explanation, Jesus' plan for a little "hide-out" in Tyre is frustrated by an unwanted seeker (7:24–27).

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is always on the move. His movements before his first passion prediction on the way up to Jerusalem (8:31), however, often seem coerced or haphazard. His destinations are spontaneously decided, repeatedly diverted, and sometimes involve

detours that hardly resemble a planned trail. In addition to Jesus' commitment to proclaim the gospel, which does not allow him to stay in Capernaum (1:38), where he goes is also dependent on other peoples' (re)actions as well as chance rather than his own decision.³³ As a result, Jesus' movements seem more like those of a drifter or vagabond, who wanders about not because of a self-determined and pre-arranged traveling plan, but because of necessity, which may be understood in divine, human and/or fortuitous terms. Long before Jesus is physically arrested (14:46), he has already been subjected to a less conspicuous but equally confining form of arrest that governs and inhibits his comings and goings.

In comparison, Jesus' trip to Jerusalem seems planned and methodological. Not only does Jesus refer to Jerusalem as his destination (10:33a), the progression from Caesarea Philippi (8:27) through Galilee (9:30), from Capernaum (9:33) into Judea and beyond the Jordan (10:1), and finally from Jericho (10:46) to Jerusalem (11:1, 11) is clearly charted, and entails no criss-crossing that makes no geographical sense. Before we credit Jesus with autonomy and agency over this trip, however, we must remember that Jesus has already characterized this trip as a "necessity" (δεῖ, 8:31) in his first passion prediction. In that sense, whether the "necessity" is by virtue of the control that the evil authorities have over this world and/or God's permissive will (12:6–8; 14:35–36), Jesus' steps have nevertheless been circumscribed and mapped for him.

In Mark's Gospel, movement by necessity is hardly a personal frustration of Jesus.³⁴ People sometimes have to travel a long distance to reach Jesus (3:8), and they generally come out of need or necessity, like friends or relatives who are sick, demon-possessed, paralyzed, deaf, or blind (1:32–33; 2:3–4; 3:10–11; 5:22–23; 6:54–56; 7:25, 32; 8:22; 9:14–18), and personal sicknesses that range from leprosy (1:40) to chronic hemorrhaging (5:25–27). In addition to these

³³ While I appreciate Kelber's insightful analysis of the implications Jesus' boat trips (4:35–8:21) may have on Jewish-Gentile relations, I cannot agree with his statement that Jesus' "first [boat] voyage . . . and all subsequent voyages are willed and ordered by him" (30). I also have trouble with the way he interprets the direction of some of the trips; for example, Kelber claims that 8:13 is a boat trip that takes Jesus back onto Jewish soil, but 8:22 clearly states that he and his disciples land at Bethsaida.

³⁴ One major argument of S. C. Wong's work is, of course, that "necessity" continues to exert a strong influence on minorities, the underprivileged, and the colonized.

natural and supernatural factors, there are also human factors that make people go places where they do not choose. There is, for example, John the Baptizer who is arrested and imprisoned by Herod (1:14; 6:17), or Simon of Cyrene who is “forced” (ἀγγαρεύουσιν, 15:21a) to carry Jesus’ cross to Golgotha by the Romans. Summing up the constraints and control that the Jewish and Roman authorities have over people with the verb “hand over” (παραδίδωμι, 13:9b, 11a),³⁵ Mark is adamant that what happened to the Baptizer and Simon of Cyrene will also befall all of God’s faithful.

Politics of Time and Time of Politics

Both Mack (330–331) and Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 310) have made some brief and general comments regarding the social and political weakness of Mark’s politics of parousia, which, by the way it views evil and suffering as unalterable conditions short of God’s direct intervention, is basically a politic of postponement and passivity.³⁶ Read alongside the materiality of Roman colonization, however, Mark’s overdetermined politics may become understandable. Considering the time frame and the disastrous results of the two Jewish-Roman wars (66–70 C.E.; 135 C.E.), as well as the scholarly consensus that Mark was written sometime in the latter half of the first century C.E. (the ongoing scholarly disagreement whether the Gospel was written before or after the first Jewish-Roman war hardly seems to matter at this point), the Roman colonial world in which Mark found himself might well be one in which power relations were so unequal that, as Mark depicts, colonial subjects might easily have their heads chopped off or bodies crucified, but the most that they could do with a sword was to cut off an ear of a slave who worked for those in power (14:47). Under such circumstances, one can hardly blame Mark’s “eclipse of human instrumentality in the divine intervention in history” (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 19). Instead of occluding Mark’s

³⁵ The verb “hand over” (παραδίδωμι) is one of Mark’s favorites. He uses it to describe the betrayal of Jesus (3:19; 14:10, 18, 21), the passion of Jesus (9:31; 10:33; 15:1, 10, 15), the arrest of the Baptizer (1:14) as well as the inevitable suffering of Jesus’ followers (see Trakatellis, 59–60). Notice also how the verb is often used in conjunction with the socio-political authorities.

³⁶ Similar politics of passivity can be found in other ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings, like the Testament of Moses (see Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 104–105).

agency, one may well come to appreciate Mark's subtle but continual protest against the colonial powers. For example, through his constructions of colonial subjects and their need to subject themselves to necessity, Mark also constructs a Roman colonial world that is full of restrictions, persecutions, and dislocations.³⁷ The violent murder of Jesus, as well as the persecution that is said to await all the faithful, are in and of themselves strong critiques of the colonial (dis)order presently in existence.

If Mark's politics of time, that of Jesus' future parousia, makes sense in Mark's particular span of time, his belief that only God can, and inevitably God will intervene to change the course of (colonial) history is not necessarily or equally applicable to another time. In other words, time matters in politics just as much as politics may matter in time. For example, during the Algerian revolution for independence in the 1960s, Sartre's ("Introduction") talk about a historical necessity of colonial collapse—which, like Mark, can be characterized as a politics of postponement and passivity³⁸—was forcefully challenged by Fanon, who pointed out how passively believing in a "torch that was already there, waiting for that turn of history" might prolong the process of subjugation, and was adamant that "bad nigger's misery . . . [must] shape a torch with which to burn down the world" (*Black Skin*, 134). For Fanon, the 1960s were a time when his people could work to ensure that change would take place; if instead, they left everything to history, to what was supposedly inevitable, what would inevitably happen was the continuation of colonial rule. Now, over thirty years after the success of the Algerians

³⁷ Trakatellis (59) suggests, for example, that Mark is making a point to highlight the horror of the demon's oppressive power by detailing the suffering of the demon-possessed boy four times in one single pericope (9:17–18, 20, 22, 26). Such detailed descriptions of demonic torment is, of course, also found in the episode of the Gerasene demoniac (5:2–5), which may be interpreted as an identification of Roman colonization with demon possession because of the demon's name (Myers, 190–194; Waetjen, *Reordering of Power*, 115–117), as well as the parable of the wicked tenants (12:3–5), which is one of Mark's most direct attacks on those who are in power.

³⁸ Technically speaking, at least one major difference seems to exist between how Mark and Sartre believe change and deliverance will take place: while Mark clearly rejects the notion that Satan would cast out Satan (3:23–27), Sartre believes that the colonialist apparatus "will manufacture its own destruction" (xxviii). They both do seem to share, however, the belief that the victims have history on their side. Both trust that, given time, change and deliverance will come without any venture on the part of the victims. For Mark, God will come to destroy the "wicked tenants" (12:9); for Sartre, the colonialist will simply self-destruct.

and many other formerly colonized people, it is certainly not the right time to revert back to Mark's (colonial) politics of parousia, which discounts or denies the importance of human efforts, and the agency of human beings because of overwhelming material constraints.

Summary

Short of God's direct intervention, Jesus is presented by Mark as God's last, and best, attempt to call people, especially those in power and authority, to repentance, and to replace Satan's rule with God's kingdom. Jesus, however, finds himself constrained in his movements, and limited in what he can do with his disciples as well as his opponents. Even his family and his hometown reject him, and those whom he heals do not necessarily listen to all he has to say. In the end, his mission, like those of his predecessors, fails because of lack of human support, human beings' tendency to vacillate, human fear, human greed, and, last but not least, Satan's strong power. As a result, those who follow Jesus can only follow his example in suffering and death.

In Mark's constructions, colonial subjects are limited in their choices as well as their abilities to bring about positive socio-political change. Their lives are filled with frustration, pain, and anguish. Mark's disappointment with human efforts, however, does not dismiss his hope of a different tomorrow, which he entrusts to the divine. Concurrent with his constructions of colonial subjectivity is a politics of postponement and passivity which promises the dissipation of all sufferings, and the coming of a happy future. For Mark, the suffering and death of Jesus and his followers will move God to intervene directly as well as more promptly. Such an intervention will lead to Jesus' parousia in authority and power as well as human salvation.

Whether one puts Mark's composition before or after 70 C.E., Mark's stance—which can be summarized as “pessimism in the present, but faith in the future”—is still understandable in a desperate colonial situation, which was what the Jewish situation seems to be both before and between the two Jewish-Roman wars. As colonial situations change, like the postcolonial or neocolonial situations we find ourselves in today, a different politics will also have to be imagined and practiced.

CHAPTER SIX

SUBJECTS OF GENDER: WOMEN AT THE CROSS(ROADS) OF A TRAFFICKING ACT

Employing a traffic metaphor, Kimberle Crenshaw ("Demarginalizing the Intersection,") has recently suggested that African American women are often caught at the crossroads of two different lanes of political identification: gender and race (see also Crenshaw, "Whose Story").¹ Since most oppositional politics is mobilized on the basis of one single issue, like gender *or* race, African American women end up being left bleeding at the intersection, their injury unreported and uncompensated because people mindlessly insist that accidents can only be recorded with the identification of a single lane of traffic as the cause and location of injury rather than both.

I have decided to deal with the issue of gender in my study of Mark's colonial subject constructions because, as Crenshaw reminds us, any liberational effort that focuses on a single issue to the exclusion of others will only perpetuate oppression. Both colored and white women have pointed out, sexism often remains as a problem *within* movements of decolonization (see, for example, Trinh, *Framer*, 196; and Tolbert, "Afterwords: Christianity," 351). Even Fanon, who arguably is the most often cited critic for decolonization, remains blind to his own sexist attitude in his fight against racism and colonialism. Fanon, for example, generally dismisses the need to study any issue that may be pertinent to Algerian women, and he explains the desire that black men supposedly have for white women in terms of a "property war" (by "getting" a white woman, a black male is able to challenge the honor of his white "masters" by commandeering their "prized possessions").²

¹ I need to thank R. Lee for introducing me to Crenshaw's texts. As I will further acknowledge, the idea of this chapter is in many ways indebted to R. Lee's many provocative insights (see her *Americas*).

² Here I am indebted to Varadharajan's study of Fanon (17–18). The neglect of feminist issues is especially disappointing because I agree with, say, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (31–32) that colonial/postcolonial criticism is highly indebted to feminist

I have argued in the last couple of chapters that (1) Mark constructs a contradictory colonial subject who resists the authority of the existing powers but must submit to the authority of Jesus; and (2) Mark transforms colonial subjects into objects of divine salvation by the way he denies his subjects any agency to bring about positive change. In that light, an account of Mark's treatment of women becomes more imperative because Mark has already shown a tendency to mimic an oppressive ideology; and, as Varadharajan (12) contends in reference to Althusser, there is the dangerous possibility that women become two steps removed from being a subject (that is, they are merely objects of [male] objects). How does Mark construct female colonial subject *vis-à-vis* the prescriptions given by his colonizers? In this chapter, I will focus on those Markan pericopes in which, to borrow Gagnier's phrase, "gender functions as an ideological 'narrative'" (45) that may shape the ways women understand life and the world.

Home Matters and Family Subjects

Florence Nightingale, that feminist activist who has often been coopted to become a model of "feminine" nurture and quiet service, comments that the way Jesus frees himself from family obligations to do God's will (3:31-35) is not equally applicable to women. Women who dare to claim that same freedom, Nightingale writes, will be accused of "destroying the family ties, of diminishing the obligation of the home duties" (47). My reading of Mark's Gospel has led me to concur with Nightingale's comment. Not only does Mark's Jesus never call any female character personally to leave her family to follow him like he does with Simon, Andrew, James, and John (1:16-20), Mark usually presents women in relation to their roles as mothers,

studies. Note that in addition to being insensitive to women's issues, Fanon has also exhibited a homophobic bias; for example, he writes, "I have never been able, without revulsion, to hear a *man* say of another man: 'He is so sensual!' I do not know what the sensuality of a man is. Imagine a woman saying of another woman: 'She's so terribly desirable—she is darling. . .'" (*Black Skin*, 201; see also Moore-Gilbert, 146). Let me also add that both Bakhtin and Foucault, who figure prominently in my understanding of "inter(con)textuality" and "intersubjectivity," have also been criticized for being insensitive to feminist issues; see, for example, Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry; and Susan Hekman. Note that gender has also not been a strong emphasis in the postcolonial work of Said and Bhabha.

wives, or daughters. In other words, in typical Roman fashion, women are associated with their domestic duties.³ While Mark disapproves of Jesus' mother (whose "maternal instinct" drives her to attempt to protect Jesus by taking him home), and characterizes her action as basically an opposition to God's will (3:20–21, 31–35), he has Simon's mother-in-law immediately resume her role as a hospitable hostess after Jesus heals her fever (1:29–31). Despite the applause that a number of scholars have given to Mark's presentation of the Syrophenician woman (7:24–30), I want to suggest that the episode actually betrays

³ Following Cicero's division between female sweetness and male majesty (57), Columella, for example, wrote in mid-first century C.E.:

It is right that a woman's nature is made for domestic cares, a man's for exertions out of doors and outside. So god gave man the endurance of heat and cold, journeys and labours of peace and war, that is to say agriculture and military service, to woman, as he [*sic.*] had made her unsuitable for all these things, he [*sic.*] handed over responsibility for domestic business (quoted in Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, 107).

Likewise, a tomb inscription in Rome that has been dated back to the Republican period eulogizes a woman's role as mainly wife and mother:

Stranger, I have little to say: stop and read.
This is the unbeautiful tomb of a beautiful woman.
Her parents called her Claudia by name.
She loved her husband with her heart.
She bore two children: one of these
she leaves on the earth, the other she buries under the earth.
Her speech was delightful, her gait graceful.
She kept house, she made wool. I have finished. Go
(quoted in Susan Treggiari, 116).

Tied to their roles in the family, Roman women were, unlike their male counterparts, not allowed to vote or to hold elected office, even their access to law courts was restricted (Treggiari, 118). According to Gordon Williams (126), these prohibitions from civic duties in actuality equate women with children, because Roman males before puberty were also barred from the same activities. G. Williams (131) further suggests that the restriction of Roman women from the public arena is best shown by the Roman historian, Livy's account that when a group of people broke the laws of the Republic in the so-called "Bacchanalian Conspiracy" of 186 B.C.E., the men involved were punished by the state, but the women involved— as marginal members of the public community but subjects of the family—were sent back to their families to receive their punishment. As one reads about how Roman women were defined by domestic duties, however, one must not forget to make the distinction between prescription and description. What we read is how the mainstream, or— in Amy Ling's term ("I'm Here," 52)—"malestream" society would like to see women live their lives; how women actually lived could be a very different story. The same, of course, applies to Mark's presentation of women. Note also that the place and status of women in Roman society were quite similar to those of the Greeks; in fact, Columella claims that his prescription for women is derived from both Roman traditions as well as Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (Wallace-Hadrill, 107).

an alliance between racism, or ethnocentrism and sexism. Not only does the episode confirm home and family as the arena where women may find a place and have a say, it further acknowledges non-Jewish female as second-class citizens.

Those who affirm this Markan pericope generally do so on three bases: (1) it is revolutionary for the Syrophoenician woman to leave her own home, which is a woman's assigned territory, to seek out a man, Jesus, for a favor (for example, Hisako Kinukawa, 54–55); (2) she enters into a verbal dual with Jesus, wins, and gets what she requests of Jesus (for example, Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 185); and (3) with her reply, she becomes an agent, or a catalyst who helps Jesus understand the inclusive nature of his mission (for example, Dewey, 485). Notice, however, that this woman does not really “make a place in a public setting” as Kinukawa claims (54–55); her encounter with Jesus happens inside a “house” (οἰκίαν, 7:24b), or a home. The favor that she asks of Jesus, and the favor that Jesus grants also has to do with home and family: it is the healing of her demon-possessed daughter rather than something that she desires for herself or her town. Like Jairus before her (5:22–23), she falls at Jesus' feet and asks for the healing of a daughter (7:25–26). Rather than simply granting her request like he does with Jairus, however. Mark's Jesus adds insult to her injury by referring to her and her daughter as “dogs” (κυνάρτις, 7:27c) who have no right to consume the food that is reserved for the “children” (τέκνα, 7:27b and c). While scholars like Dewey explain this difference in treatment on the basis of the woman's ethnicity, Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 185) points out that ethnicity cannot be the issue because Jesus has already healed the Gerasene demoniac (5:1–13), and Jesus has just blurred the distinction between Jews and non-Jews in the immediately preceding episode (7:1–23). I want to suggest, however, that if the issue here involves more than ethnicity, it also involves more than gender; instead, it involves a combination of the two.⁴ Or, in Crenshaw's terms, injury does occur at intersections.

Jesus' derogatory statement has to involve more than gender because, following Mark's narrative sequence, Jesus has also already healed three women: Simon's mother-in-law (1:29–31), Jairus' daughter

⁴ In contrast, Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 185) sees Jesus' response as a test of the woman's faith, and the reference to “dogs” as an intimation of the woman's Cynic-like retort (Cynic philosophers were often called “dogs” in the ancient world because of the biting style of their verbal combat).

(5:21–24, 35–43), and the hemorrhaging woman (5:25–34). Moreover, when Jesus redefines his family, he makes it clear that “sister” (ἀδελφή, 3:35b) will be part of his family. Two things clearly discriminate this particular request: (1) the requestor for Jesus’ healing is a woman rather than a man;⁵ and (2) the potential recipient of Jesus’ healing is not just a female, she is a “Greek, a Syrophoenician” (Ἑλληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα, 7:26a and b) female.⁶ It is true that the Syrophoenician woman, by virtue of her quick wit, is able to move Jesus, and secure health for her daughter, but she does so at a great price. Instead of arguing with Jesus that both she and her daughter are also children with equal rights and equal shares in the kingdom of God, she simply affirms that “dogs” do receive “trickled-down” benefits from the “children.” Her acquiescence results in another healing miracle by Jesus, but it is also the only healing miracle in Mark that Jesus performs without ever meeting the “healee.” Is this “remote-controlled” healing, being a step removed from the personal visit that Jesus made to Jairus’ house, the equivalent of a piece of “falling crumb”?

The way Mark consistently confines female subjects to matters of home and family can also be seen by how he links the scribal exploitation of widows directly with widows’ “houses” (τὰς οἰκίας, 12:40a), and how he has the woman anointing Jesus “in the house of Simon the leper” (ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ Σίμωνος τοῦ λεπροῦ, 14:3a). In fact, one may further observe that the Syrophoenician woman, the poor widow who makes an offering in the temple, the woman who anoints Jesus, and the hemorrhaging woman also seem to share a key common factor as they exercise their initiative and independence: the absence of a male figure in their lives. Once a female character is associated with a male figure in Mark’s Gospel, she either loses her independence or she has to work indirectly through her man.⁷ Simon, for

⁵ The hemorrhaging woman, as one will no doubt recall, never asks Jesus for a healing. Her healing occurs because she simply touches Jesus’ clothes with faith (5:27–29). Jesus, however, refuses to let this incident happen without a face-to-face encounter with the woman. I will comment on this episode a little bit later on within this chapter.

⁶ Others may want to argue that Jesus’ reluctant response is somehow related to his negative experience with the Gentile Gerasenes (5:14–17), and/or Jesus’ desire to be alone (7:24). The problem is, one may say the same about Jesus’ experience in Mark 6, where he willingly initiates a miracle (6:33–44) despite having been rejected by people of his hometown (6:1–6a), and interrupted in his planned retreat (6:30–32).

⁷ Here may be another example of how Mark simply reinscribes Roman pre-

example, acts as his mother-in-law's spokesman while she behaves as his household servant (1:30–31). Herodius, on the other hand, has to delay the gratification of her desire to kill the Baptizer because of Herod's protection (6:19–20); and that gratification only comes about through Herod's direct order, although it is mediated by Herodius' clever, "behind-the-scene" manipulation (6:21–28).⁸

Mark asserts the importance of having a man in a woman's life with another commonality that the Syrophoenician woman, the poor widow, the woman who anoints Jesus, and the hemorrhaging woman share: without a man, they are all targets of (male) harassment or exploitation. The Syrophoenician woman is insulted by Jesus, the widow exploited by the temple system, the woman who anoints Jesus "scolded" (ἐνεβριμῶντο, 14:5b) and "bothered" (κόπους, 14:6c) by some onlookers, and the hemorrhaging woman taken advantage of by doctors. Although some scholars see the episode concerning the hemorrhaging woman as one that is favorable and liberating for women (for example, Dewey, 181; and Kinukawa, 33–47), Tolbert

scriptions for female roles. The Roman (male) guardian system may be well known (the Law of the Twelve Tables from the fifth century B.C.E. places Roman women under some form of male tutelage throughout their lives, see John K. Evans, 7), what may be less known is the explicit sexism that underlies this system. G. Williams (126) quotes from two Roman jurists, one from the second century C.E. (Gaius), and the other from the third century C.E. (Ulpian). Gaius writes, "Fathers can appoint by will guardians for children who are in their control—for males up to the age of puberty, but for females of any age at all, even if they are married. For our ancestors wished that women, even of mature age, should be controlled by guardians because of the unreliability of their judgment." Similarly, Ulpian states, "Guardians are appointed equally for males and for females: but for males only to the age of puberty and because of the instability of youth, but for women as much after as before puberty, both because of the weakness of their sex and because of their total ignorance of legal business." Like Mark's Herodius, women who exercised power in Rome primarily did so through their husbands (Diana E. E. Kleiner and Susan B. Matheson, "Introduction," 12). G. Williams (128) points out that an ideal Roman woman is one who obeys her husband absolutely. Wallace-Hadrill (112, 114) comments that the way Roman women were circumscribed within the family only reduced women to inferiority, and led to their subjection to men.

⁸ As Mark makes Herodius the "scapegoat" for John the Baptizer's murder, Mark is also careful to expunge Herodius of any public or socio-political sensibility by clarifying that her problem with John the Baptizer is purely personal (6:17–19). In Mark's depiction, Herodius is just another "stereotypical" woman viciously seeking personal revenge. Unlike Simon's mother-in-law, who serves namelessly and voicelessly in the Gospel, Mark's inclusion of Herodius, a predatory, calculating, and unscrupulous woman who "hops" from one brother to another, also reminds me of Belsey's comment that "contrasted female stereotypes" are often given simultaneously to define "what the social body endorses and what it wants to exclude" (*Subject*, 165).

has insightfully suggested that its ending maintains the importance of "kinship with a male" ("Mark," 268). This determined and aggressive woman who, without asking for anybody's permission, claims healing *for herself* in a public place, is finally seen trembling and kneeling to give a full account of her healing to Jesus (5:33). Calling her "daughter" (θυγάτηρ, 5:34b), Jesus incorporates her into his family, and establishes himself as her spokesman, provider, and protector in a way Jairus is to his daughter (5:21–24, 35–43). As Jesus' imperative of permission, "you may go in peace" (ὑπάγε εἰς εἰρήνην, 5:34d) further evidences, this woman is once again placed under the direction of a man. In Mark, even the new family of Jesus is associated with what Gagnier calls "compulsory femininity" (207), which is dependence on, and submission to, male figures.

Dewey may be a little bit over-enthusiastic when she claims that Jesus' redefinition of his family (3:31–35) "includes no human father, no authority figure to whom obedience is owed . . . [and that] Jesus is brother and son to the women in the group" (478). Even if one dismisses Jesus' designation of the hemorrhaging woman as "daughter" to be merely a term of endearment, Mark's Jesus will repeatedly remind us that God is the "father figure" of his new family (8:38; 11:25; 13:32; 14:36), and as such, patriarchy remains unchallenged. Not only does Jesus' redefinition of his family not free women from obligations of home and family, it also does not deliver them from male domination.⁹ They must be obedient to God, the "Father," and to Jesus, God's authorized agent or regent.

My argument that Jesus' so-called "new" family is (to switch the terms of Jesus' metaphor) but a case of "old wine" put into "new wineskins" (2:22) can also be seen in the episode concerning the Sadducees and their question about the resurrection (12:18–27). Schüssler Fiorenza (*In Memory of Her*, 143–144) is certainly correct when she identifies patriarchy and property as the core issues within

⁹ Others (for example, Hamerton-Kelly, 110; and Kinukawa, 132–133) have also argued that Jesus' statement (in response to some Pharisees' question about a man's right to divorce a woman) about a woman divorcing a man (10:2–12) is an indication of gender equality. The point that Mark's Jesus tries to make in that pericope, however, has to do with the permanence of marriage rather than the power relations within marriage. Since Mark does not seem to challenge patriarchy, that emphasis on permanence will only place the majority of the burden on the shoulders of women. That seems to be the case with Roman laws, which Mark 10:1–12 seems to replicate. Although Roman women did have the right to divorce their husbands (Treggiari, 123), G. Williams (128) points out the Roman ideals of the

the levirate marriage scenario given by the Sadducees; she is wrong, however, when she concludes that Jesus' answer signifies the end of patriarchal marriage. If one considers Jesus' pronouncement that people will no longer marry after the resurrection (12:25a and b) alongside his self-designation as "the bridegroom" (ὁ νυμφίος, 2:19b and c, 20a), and his analogy of humans in heaven with angels of God alongside Mark's other references to angels (1:13c; 8:38; 13:27, 32), one may conclude instead that Mark sees Jesus as the great patriarch who marries and owns everybody in heaven, and everybody will be serving Jesus like Simon's mother-in-law does in the house the night she is healed (1:29–31).¹⁰ In Mark's Gospel, patriarchy never dies; women will only be subjects at home, and always subjected to the men and the needs of the family.

Mark's "Model Minority"?

The way Simon's mother-in-law "serves" (δουλεύει, 1:31c) Jesus in the early part of the Gospel, and the description near the end that the women who follow Jesus to the cross and to the tomb used to do the same (δουλεύουν, 15:41a), have been used by some scholars to contend that women are "model disciples" (Kinukawa, 96) in

"one and only husband," and the idea of an eternal marriage bond. With Cicero's indirect influence, Augustus further decreed an edict against adultery in 18 B.C.E. Under that edict, husbands must divorce and sue an adulterous wife (otherwise the husband himself was guilty of pimping), but wives could not sue an adulterous husband (G. Williams, 129–132). Mark's Jesus, in his response to the Pharisees, follows almost every single aspect of Roman law and ideal outlined above (the permission for women to initiate divorce, the permanence of marriage, and the pronouncement against adultery); the difference is Mark's Jesus seems to curb divorce by prohibiting all divorced people from remarrying (he calls it "adultery"), Augustus does so by penalizing divorced women who did not remarry within six to eighteen months, and disallowing women convicted of adultery the right to remarry a freeborn (G. Williams, 131; and Jane F. Gardner, 117, 123–126). When it comes to marriage and divorce, both Mark's Jesus and the Roman society seem to be most concerned with the maintenance of marriage.

¹⁰ Because of the brevity of this episode involving Simon's mother-in-law, Mack argues that its purpose has less to do with healing, but more to do with the contrast it creates with the conflict that Jesus experiences in the synagogue. Commenting on the "healing" of Simon's mother-in-law, Mack writes: "It is a picture of the way things might be were there no conflict in the world: the master, disciples, at home, a slight bit of fever taken care of quickly, *women in attendance*, a meal together. . . . It was the only space he [Mark] had to give expression to his dreams" (240–241, emphasis mine). These kind of dreams, whether they are Mark's or Mack's (or both), are nightmares for women.

Mark's Gospel (for example, Dewey, 476-477; Myers, 396-397; and John J. Schmidt). In contrast to the male disciples, these women already understand and possess the quality that Mark's Jesus chooses to characterize his followers as well as his own life and ministry; namely, the willingness and ability to "serve" (διακονέω) (9:35; 10:41-45). According to Maria J. Selvidge (105), Mark also identifies Jesus' passion with the suffering of the hemorrhaging woman by using parallel terms to describe their plights, like "suffers many things" (πολλὰ παθεῖσα, 5:26; πολλὰ παθεῖν, 8:31; πολλὰ πάθη, 9:12c), "blood" (αἷματος, 5:25, 29a; αἷμά, 14:24b), "body" (σώματι, 5:29b; σῶμά, 14:8b, 22c; σῶμα, 15:43c), and "plague/whip" (μάστιγος, 5:29b; μαστιγώσουσιν, 10:34a).

Likewise, the woman who anoints Jesus at Bethany (14:3-9) has been lauded as (1) one who assumes the traditionally male-dominated role of a prophet and consecrates Jesus for his divinely appointed task (Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xiv); and (2) one who, in contrast to Peter's mere verbal acknowledgment (8:27-33), understands Jesus' messiahship is one that involves suffering and death (Kinukawa, 84, 88). Finally, unlike the male disciples who end up either betraying, deserting, or denying Jesus (14:43-52, 66-72), Mark has several women following Jesus to the cross as well as to the tomb (15:40-41, 47; 16:1-2; see Kinukawa, 91, 108; and Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 291-292).¹¹

Despite these arguments, I still find Mark's constructions of female subjects problematic, because Mark seems determined to keep his so-called "model minority" at the margins, and by doing so, he seems to profess rather than protest the oppression of women. In addition to what I have said about women as family subjects, Mark's female characters tend to assume "mop-up," and "back-up" roles. For instance, Mark specifies that the woman at Bethany is anointing Jesus' body in anticipation of its burial (14:8b), and further qualifies her act not as a "prophetic sign-action" (Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xiii, xiv), but one of resignation ("she did what she could" [ὅ ἔσχεν ἐποιήσεν], 14:8a). Unable to stop the plot for Jesus' life, what she does is akin to cleaning up the ashes of an unjust situation. That is also what the women have come to the tomb to do. Once again, Mark provides the necessary details: not only do they come with

¹¹ For a discussion on whether Mark is naming three or four women in this closing section of his Gospel, see Kinukawa, 91-92.

spices with the intention to anoint Jesus' corpse (16:1), their worry over the tombstone indicates that they do not come with any expectation of a miracle (16:3). They are not there out of faith in Jesus' promised resurrection, but out of duty; they are there to clear the remain-ing business. In fact, Kinukawa herself comments that "the anointing of the dead was never done by men. It was women's responsibility, and therefore women were not allowed to enter the temple" (88-89). In both scenarios, then, Mark is only reinscribing the traditional prescriptions for women's activities.

Similarly, the sudden appearance of these women at the cross and at the tomb (15:40-41, 47; 16:1-3)—after the failure of the male disciples, and as Mark's narrative comes to a close—seems to confirm women's roles as the consummate alternates. Like Simon's mother-in-law (1:29-31) and Jairus' wife (5:40), Mark has women staying in the house and in the background, doing what they do without a name and without a voice until the men are, for one reason or another, unavailable; then and only then will women be given the room to operate outside the home and in the frontline as men's substitutes or replacements.¹² As I have mentioned earlier, those women who seem to have traveled and acted somewhat independently in Mark—like the hemorrhaging woman (5:25-34), the Syrophenician woman (7:24-30), the poor widow at the temple (12:41-44), and the woman who anoints Jesus at Bethany (14:3-9)—are not identified without any male association. "From a distance" (*ἀπὸ μακρόθεν*, 15:40a), which Mark uses to describe the way several women observe Jesus' crucifixion, may well be an apt description of the way these women have always followed and served Jesus. When Jesus and his male disciples are in Galilee and then on the way to Jerusalem, these women are kept invisible, out of the way, until the male disciples have fallen away. Perhaps even more damaging to the "model minor-

¹² The same has been said to be the case for Roman women. In fact, classicists have argued that even women's primacy over the homefront is predicated on their husbands' regular absence (a result of Roman militarism, and later imperialism; see Kleiner and Matheson, "Introduction," 11). This idea that women's activities are predicated on men's absence can be seen in the writing of the Augustus poet, Ovid:

Today Mars is so taken up with foreign campaigning
 That Venus has made a clean sweep of Rome,
 Her own Aeneas' city. Pretty girls have a ball. No virgins
 Except the unasked—and a smart kid asks for herself
 (quoted in Treggiari, 120).

ity" thesis is Mark's decision to have these perennial "mop-ups" fail at their call to "back-up" the disciples. Having been shown the empty tomb, and told to go and tell the good news of Jesus' resurrection and imminent reappearance—by who else but a "young man" (νεανίσκον, 16:5a)—these "replacement disciples," like their male counterparts, become fearful (ἐφοβοῦντο, 16:8d) and flee (ἔφυγον, 16:8a) without saying anything to anyone. Since Mark's tragic ending is predicated on the failure of these women, whose silence affects not just themselves but also the potential reunion of Jesus and his male disciples (16:7),¹³ I find it difficult to accept Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's argument that Mark gives no distinctive role to women within his Gospel. Instead of presenting women as the "model minority," Mark presents them as inadequate male surrogates, who prove to be incapable of serving as "back-ups" in the affairs of men.¹⁴

¹³ I am assuming, of course, that Mark's Gospel ends at 16:8; for a helpful review of the debates associated with Mark's ending, see Andrew Lincoln. In his study of Renaissance plays, Sinfield (*Faultlines*, 73–74), referring to the work of both Dymrna Callaghan and Pierre Macherey, suggests that the way women's silence provides narrative closure for these plays may also serve as the point of ideological disclosure. In the case of Mark, the silence of these women at the end of his Gospel discloses not only his gender bias, but also his view of human agency, or the lack thereof (see my previous chapter). Cheung recently suggests that silence in Asian American literature, unlike its European or Euro-American counterparts, is not necessarily a sign of passivity and weakness (*Articulate Silences*, 20–23). Mark seems to share this more varied understanding of silence; for example, Jesus' silence "enables" him to frustrate the high priest and intrigue Pilate (14:60–61; 15:1–5). However, this kind of "articulate silence" is not what Mark has in mind in reference to the women at the tomb, because he specifically links their silence with "fear" (16:8).

¹⁴ In that same vein, one may question if there may not be an implied suggestion that women should, then, stick to matters of home and family. Since I do not agree with the "model minority thesis" that some scholars have argued concerning Mark's representations of women, I will not spend too much time on their problematic lauding of women as models of service in Mark. Let me say, though, that any such argument is at best suspect if it emphasizes individual examples without any substantial institutional or systemic examination (see Sucheng Chan, 167–171; and Schüssler Fiorenza, "Practice," 189–191). For example, when Kinukawa (116) claims that women's traditionally subservient status makes them readily identifiable with Jesus' understanding of discipleship as sacrificial service, or when she interprets the widow at the temple (12:41–44) as "a model . . . [of] silently bearing her own unjust situation" (75–76), is she not in effect affirming patriarchal oppression? Rather than rejecting a system that imposes a life of subservience on women, this kind of rationale and rhetoric merely proposes that the service rendered by women should encourage all to focus on serving Jesus. For a critique of both a "hermeneutics of sacrifice" and an emphasis on "surrogacy" from a womanist perspective, see JoAnne M. Terrell.

The Tragedy of Trafficking Women

I begin this chapter with Crenshaw's traffic analogy and the injury that women often suffer untold in a straightly colonial/anti-colonial interpretation of Mark. Another feminist scholar, Gayle Rubin, has also written about another kind of injury that is peculiar to women with what she terms "traffic in women." Rubin suggests that women are often the building blocks on which homosocial communities of men are established; through their activities, or their being given in marriage (by men to men), male-dominant kinship networks are both formed and reinforced.¹⁵ Goldberg has further argued that the favorite representation of women within homosocial communities is their maternal role, because "mother" is understood as a "trope of ideal femininity, a fantasmatic female that secures male-male arrangements and an all male history" ("Bradford's 'Ancient Members,'" 63). I have already argued that "mother," along with "wife" and "daughter," are Mark's favorite representations of women, now I want to argue that Mark is also guilty of trafficking women in Rubin's sense. For example, that is exactly what Mark does with Simon's mother-in-law in Simon's house that night (1:29–31). It happens in the first chapter of the Gospel, Jesus has just started his ministry; in fact, Jesus has just finished his very first miraculous act with the so-called "first disciples" (Simon, Andrew, James, and John) by his side (1:16–28), and it is the very first time that Jesus and these disciples have a

¹⁵ I am indebted to R. Lee (*Americas*, 19, 27) for linking Spivak's work with both Rubin's and Crenshaw's essays. While Spivak's often-cited essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," points out the uniquely female dilemma that Crenshaw attends to, her other essay ("Subaltern Studies," 27–28) also makes an argument similar to Rubin's as Spivak continues to contend for the need for subaltern studies to examine the buried subjectivity of the subaltern women. The applicability of Rubin's argument to Roman societies can be seen from the following inscription which has been dated to the second century B.C.E.:

Medeios, having given away his daughter Philippe, and Souniadas, having accepted her, together provided distribution of wheat and banquets to all citizens and foreigners for several days on the occasion of the wedding . . . (quoted in Riet van Bremen, 265 n. 100).

Augustus is also known for marrying his daughter, Julia, to three different men to fulfill his own political ambitions (G. Williams, 133). According to Kleiner and Matheson ("Introduction," 12), women were often forced to remarry simply because their fathers or brothers needed to shift their political alliances, which understandably led to personal dissatisfaction on the part of many women. The motives behind Augustus' edict against adultery, then (especially in light of the edict's double-standard and Augustus' own history with Julia) become doubly suspicious.

retreat together away from the crowd. After Jesus miraculously rids Simon's mother-in-law of her fever, Mark has her playing the (expected) role of the perfect hostess; and Mark is very clear that she does not serve only Jesus, but that she serves "them" (αὐτοῖς, 1:31c). The picture that Mark paints, then, has one woman (Simon's mother-in-law) doing all the work and taking care of all the chores, so that five grown men (Jesus, Simon, Andrew, James, and John) can rest, interact, and socialize together.

Let me give another example. Note how Herod's birthday banquet is, in Mark's words, restricted to "his great men and officers and the chief men of Galilee" (τοῖς μεγιστᾶσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῖς χιλιάρχοις καὶ τοῖς πρώτοις τῆς Γαλιλαίας, 6:21). Even his wife, Herodius, cannot participate, which explains why her daughter has to run in and out the banquet hall to talk to each of her parents respectively (6:24-25). The daughter is also not there to participate in the banquet, she only goes into the banquet hall to dance (10:22a).¹⁶ Like the food served on the banquet table, and like Simon's mother-in-law who serves (food) in Simon's house, her role is to facilitate the bonding among men.

This commodification of women may also explain why in Mark, John the Baptizer condemns the "wife swapping" between Herod and his brother Philip (6:17-18), but Jesus does not utter a critical word about the levirate marriage custom itself when the Sadducees bring it to his attention (12:18-27). Much like the Hindu practice of widow burning, the levirate marriage passes a "son-less" widow to her brother-in-law, and thus assures the continuity of both family name and property, as well as fortifies men as proper subjects, and women as male properties and exchange objects. The Sadducees' question, "will she be wife of which of them [the seven brothers]?" (τίνος αὐτῶν ἔσται γυνή, 12:23c), along with the Baptizer's disapproval of Herodius' remarriage, portray women as, to borrow Bartlett's phrase, "marriageable objects rather than marrying agents" (72). Judging from the grudge Herodius holds against John the Baptizer (6:19a), however, she obviously prefers to be married to Herod rather than staying with Philip. Herodius' desire to intervene in this male business of women exchange, then, may be the first reason she draws such condemnation from Mark and Mark's interpreters. Furthermore,

¹⁶ According to Kathleen E. Corley (24-79, 93-95), the arrangement to have women entertain in an all-male banquet is a traditional motif of antiquity.

she disrupts the female “conduit” that is supposed to solidify male relations and benefit male participants. Not only does her “behind-the-scenes” manipulation create discord between Herod and John the Baptizer, she also participates in reaping a share of the benefit—she gets her revenge (6:27–28).

Likewise, after writing over fifteen chapters on the relationship between Jesus and the (male) disciples, Mark suddenly gives the tell-tale footnote that there have been women serving Jesus in the background in Galilee as well as in Jerusalem, and, for the first time, he even gives some of their names (15:40–41). As we have seen, Mark does so only after the (male) disciples have failed at Jesus’ passion. If one thinks for a moment that these newly named women disciples are of equal status to the failed men disciples, Mark makes it clear that these women’s (back-up) roles are limited to the restoration of the broken bond between Jesus and his (male) disciples.¹⁷ For these women are never told what the resurrection has to do with them in Mark’s first Easter morning; they are only told to “go, tell his disciples and Peter” (ὑπάγετε εἰπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ Πέτρῳ, 16:7a) that a reunion is awaiting them (the male disciples) at Galilee.¹⁸ These women disciples, in other words, are called to be mere channels, so that they can help renew a brotherly bond to which they remain marginal. Mark incorporates these named women disciples in the end of his Gospel in such a way that he secures their subordinate status even while portending, or pretending their importance.

Since women are trafficked as building blocks of male bonding, they are often also blamed for the breakup of male relationships. The women’s inability to say what the young man told them to tell (16:7–8) threatens the restoration of the (male) disciples, and their reunion with Jesus. On the other hand, the already thin cords between John the Baptizer and Herod, and between Jesus and Peter are broken when Herodius and the servant girl of the high priest speak

¹⁷ Kinukawa, responding to Schüssler Fiorenza’s reconstruction of a discipleship of equals (*In Memory of Her*, 154), insightfully observes that “in Mark’s Gospel . . . there is no explicit description of men and women disciples working together. The Markan narrative records individuals or a group of men or women separately” (90).

¹⁸ Although linguistically speaking, there is no way to identify if the second person plural pronoun, “you” (ὑμεῖς, 16:7a; ὑμεῖς, 16:7b [omitted]; and ὑμῖν, 16:7c) is masculine or feminine (or both), the fact that the alluded promise of a future reunion in Galilee is given by Jesus to his male disciples right after their private, for-male-only Passover together (14:26–28) should be enough evidence to argue that the women are not included in the second person plural pronoun of 16:7.

their own minds (5:24–28; 14:66–72).¹⁹ Women, as a result, find themselves in a “lose-lose” situation within Mark; they are either passive channels of male bonding, or active culprits of male discord.²⁰

Summary

While Mark’s politics of parousia may contain certain anti-colonial firepower, his colonial mimicry extends to his unquestioned acceptance of (Greco-Roman) patriarchy. Mark’s constructions of female subjects are more negative and disabling than have often been acknowledged. In contrast to Jesus and his male disciples who leave their families to answer the call of God, female characters in Mark are mostly confined to home and matters of the family. The domestic

¹⁹ In Mark, men generally speak for women: Simon and Andrew do it for Simon’s mother-in-law (1:30), Jairus does it for his daughter (5:22–23), Jesus does it for the woman who anoints him (14:4–9). The examples I have just given about the women at the cross and at the tomb, Herodius, and the servant girl of the high priest seem to suggest that if women do speak, they should only speak men’s words and on men’s behalf. The only other two women that are given a voice in Mark (the hemorrhaging woman and the Syrophoenician woman), show a similar Markan restriction on female speech. The hemorrhaging woman, after speaking only to herself (5:28), finishes her part by submitting a full-scale report of her experience to Jesus (5:33), while the Syrophoenician woman’s only recorded words involve her concession to Jesus that non-Jewish women are “dogs” (κυνάρια, 7:28c), who should not take food away from the “children.” In other words, women in Mark speak “properly” only if they are speaking in acquiescence to men.

²⁰ Judging from the way Mark’s Jesus heals the long-suffering hemorrhaging woman (5:25–34), denounces the “right” of a man to divorce a woman at will as a problem of man’s heart-hardenedness (10:2–9), condemns the scribes for exploiting widows (12:40–44), and defends the woman who anoints him at Bethany (14:3–9), one may be tempted to understand Mark as an advocate of gender equality. One must, however, make a distinction between the willingness to show mercy to the underprivileged and the willingness to do away with all privileges. I am reminded of a charter member of one of my former parishes, who practiced a distinctly authoritarian and admittedly ruthless style of leadership within the church. On one occasion when I felt compelled to confront him with his dictatorial style of leadership, he proceeded to tell me the story of how he once willingly helped a former “rival” within the church, *after* that particular person left the church, ran into some financial difficulty, and tearfully pleaded him for assistance. My response was to ask him how he would treat that same individual if that person had not lost the power struggle within the church, and if that person had actually prospered in his business dealings (to which my “friend” refused to give an answer). It is one thing to be nice to an underdog who offers no threat to one’s power, it is quite another thing to relinquish and share power willingly. Remember, for example, how Mark’s Jesus reserves the right to legislate a woman’s choice to remarry immediately after he protects her from the abuse of divorce (10:12).

setting is one where women can find a place and have a say, but also one in which they are defined by their relationship to men; as long as men are present, women have to defer to them, and be protected by them. Likewise, Jesus' "new family" is a gendered community in which women are asked to submit to a God called "father," and a Jesus known as "the beloved son."

Mark further reinscribes women's roles by assigning them "mop-up" and "back-up" duties. They are shown to be proficient at accepting and making the best of what "reality" has to offer, but inadequate to replace men in business that takes them beyond the homefront. Moreover, women are often portrayed as those who either make or break the homosocial communities of men. Wherever and whenever Mark's Gospel seems to subvert the traditional gender hierarchy, it always ends up reinforcing women as passive and subservient objects of men. Mark's resistance to colonialism, then, also resists the inclusion of female subjects.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Dissatisfied with the formalism that dominates contemporary literary studies of the Gospels, I have chosen a postmodern literary theory that seems to facilitate my personal commitment to socio-political liberation in my work as a New Testament critic. "Inter(con)textuality" insists that the production and interpretation of literary texts are not isolated and autonomous affairs, but are embedded in social and political conditions. In addition, the theory of "inter(con)textuality" also establishes the connection between "politicization and the transformation of consciousness" (bell hooks, 106), because textuality is understood as "a force rather than simply a trace structure" (Rajan, 63). Writing a text and writing about a literary text are, in other words, both rhetorical projects that help construct subject positions even as the projects themselves are constructed within concrete socio-political situations.

With this underlying theory, I have attempted to see what Mark, in all likelihood a colonized person writing under Roman colonization, has to say on the subjects of authority, agency, and gender. My concern is not to evaluate the factuality of Mark's Gospel, but to examine, especially in light of its colonial situation and its emphasis on Jesus' parousia, the actions and attitudes that Mark endorses and excludes.¹ What I find in Mark is a strong challenge against the existing (colonial) (dis)order; the "Gospel" has Jesus being tragically murdered by a collaborative scheme of the Jewish and Roman leaders, because Jesus is constantly questioning their authority and exposing their wickedness. At the same time, however, Mark's politics of parousia, by promising the utter destruction of both Jewish and Roman authorities upon Jesus' resurrected return, is one that mimics or duplicates the authoritarian, exclusionary, and coercive politics of his colonizers.

¹ Mark's story of Jesus, and the way it constructs subject positions, may be understood in terms of Spivak's "regulative psychobiography" ("Political Economy," 227), or James Joyce's "epiphany." Although Joyce's concept concerns more with the subjectivity of characters within a story world, his understanding of "epiphany" as "a sudden spiritual manifestation" (217) that re-constructs subjectivity seems particularly relevant to Mark in light of the Gospel's claim on divine revelation.

Not only does Mark reinscribe colonial practice in his politics of parousia, he also subscribes to the traditional hierarchy of God, man, and woman. Presenting life before and after the parousia as one of present suffering and future glory for both Jesus and his followers, Mark says symbolically but clearly that colonial subjects can do nothing to change the plight of their colonial situation short of God's direct intervention. In fact, the model provided by Mark's Jesus is for human beings to become "consenting instruments of God" (Belsey, *Subject*, 42) by surrendering to, and trusting in, "providence." In other words, agency in Mark's Gospel seems to belong to supernatural powers rather than humankind. As men in Mark are personally called by Jesus to leave home and family in their surrender to the higher calling of God (even if that calling is primarily one in which they are asked to suffer and die, and to which they do not respond very well), women in Mark are not given full or equal participation. Instead, women's activities are mainly restricted to the tending of home matters and the facilitating of male bonding.

In the remainder of this conclusion, I would like to pursue briefly three issues that have arisen from the present study. First, if, as I suggest, Mark's representations of authority, agency, and gender are limited by his moment in history, how does his Gospel compare with what a contemporary colonized group may have to say about these same subjects? Second, if, as I argue, colonial politics has so deeply inscribed on Mark that he actually reproduces it in his Gospel against colonialism, what may that imply about the possibility of resistance and change? And finally, if Mark, and the other canonical Gospels are—to borrow Derrida's terms (*Dissemination*, 95–134)—both "medicine" and "poison" at the same time, what implications may that realization have on socio-political interpretations of the Gospels, or on our role as biblical critics within today's cultural politics?

The Inter(con)texts of Chinese American Narratives

To provide a dialogue partner with Mark, I will look at contemporary Chinese American narratives.² Practicality demands that I nar-

² By "dialogue partner," I want to clarify that I am not using Chinese American narratives as a measuring stick, or an authoritative standard to judge Mark's "acceptability." Instead, I want to look at them "inter(con)textually" to show how each may become vulnerable alongside the other (R. Lee, *Americas*, 112–114).

row my focus to one small subset of colonized people. Chinese Americans seem the obvious choice considering my heritage, and as an acknowledgment that their narratives inform my own subject position(s).³

Subjects of Authority

Like Mark, contemporary Chinese American narratives are inseparable from, although not entirely dependent on, specific socio-political situations or junctures of history. E. Kim, in her pioneering work on Asian American literature (59–72, 91–121), points out that with the Vietnam war and the civil rights movement, Asian American writers since the late 1960s or 1970s have become more direct and up front in their denunciation of the racially discriminatory perspectives and policies of this country. Rather than the earlier practice of accommodating social injustice with self-blame (like Huie Kin, who blames the marginalization of Chinese Americans on their maintenance of Chinese customs; Chiang Yee, who blames it on their ignorance of the English language; or Jade Snow Wong, who blames it on personal laziness),⁴ we have Chinese American writers taking

³ For those who want to read more about the internal colonization that Chinese Americans have experienced (and are still experiencing, although to a lesser degree, today), let me recommend S. Chan (3–8, 25–35, 42, 45–67, 103–107, 110–121, 139–146, 151–152, 167–188); and Ronald Takaki (21–41, 79–178, 230–269). It is also important for me to admit that my choice of specific narratives are ideologically motivated, and that Chinese Americans do not agree on every issue as a monolithic group. This “heteroglossia” (to use Bakhtin’s term), or multiplicity of voices, can be attributed to differences in class, gender, sexual orientation, age, place of birth (whether native- or foreign-born), and even geographical location. Said (“Reflections,” 362–363), commenting on the minority cultures of this country, has also suggested that within the “foreign-born” grouping, distinctions can be made among “exiles,” “refugees,” expatriates,” and “émigrés.” Let me further add that this multiplicity is also present within the New Testament; for example, the four Gospels, each presenting a different story of Jesus and a different understanding of the parousia, do construct different colonial subject positions. I have chosen contemporary Chinese American narratives over the other three canonical Gospels because I think the former will make a sharper connection between Gospel studies and current socio-political struggles for liberation. As Clayton suggests, “one must situate one’s conclusions within a specific historical context” to give one’s political reading of literary texts power (*Pleasures*, 59). I hope my reference to Chinese American narratives will also help breakdown disciplinary barriers, although I have little doubt that some will see this section as “out-of-place” within “traditional” New Testament scholarship.

⁴ Note that even the publication of these early, apologetic writings may be linked to the dynamics of history. During and after the Second World War, with (1) China

on the racist publishing establishment of the United States (for example, Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong; and Cheung, "Reviewing," 17-20), inserting unexpectedly a chronological listing of anti-Chinese laws that the United States had legislated from 1868 to 1978 in a seemingly biographical narrative (Hong Kingston, *China Men*, 152-159), exposing how the founding "frontier myth" of this country does not apply to Chinese Americans (for example, Ruthanne Lum McCunn; Hualing Nieh; S. H. Wong; and Gish Jen), and declaring as the title of an anthology that the most famous caricature of Chinese Americans in history, Charlie Chan, "is dead" (Jessica Hagedorn).

S. C. Wong's recent work on Asian American literature, to which I have already referred more than once, follows up and supplements E. Kim's work by arguing that in addition to challenging colonial authority, many Chinese and other Asian Americans have internalized the harsh, racially prejudiced, and restrictive environment surrounding them (or, in her own terms, the "immobility" and "enforced mobility" [118-146] that they experience living in a supposedly "free-moving" country) to produce a culture of "necessity" that they begin to impose upon themselves and their descendants. Focusing on the alimentary image in narratives that range from Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*, Fae Myenne Ng's "A Red Sweater," and Chin's "Food for All His Dead," S. C. Wong (18-76) points out how these narratives are replete with (generally older) characters who have an amazing appetite to eat, and an equally amazing ability to swallow hardship. They are also willing to do whatever it takes to (over)save and (over)stock food to ensure survival and establish security. These same characters, however, often try to force traditional dishes as well as the doctrine of playing safe and "living-life-as-it-is-necessary" down the throats of their children.

Reinscribing the ideas of one's colonizers, however, is not an exclu-

becoming an ally of the United States, (2) the emergence of a sizable native-born Chinese population, and (3) the influx of better educated or better trained political refugees as China turned communist in 1949, Chinese Americans gained a better image and a new receptivity as long as they presented themselves within the stereotypical "hard-working, honest, and exotic" manner that the mainstream society had (and still has) of them (S. Chan, 121-144; and E. Kim, 59-61, 66-67). The emphasis on historical situations and the emphasis on human agency are, however, by no means mutually exclusive; both are, for example, characteristics of S. Chan's work (xiii, 81-83, 89-92, 94-97). To paraphrase R. Williams (*Marxism*, 83-89), human beings do write their own history, although they do not compose the entire script.

sive problem of the older generation. S. C. Wong (77–117) proceeds to demonstrate how contemporary Chinese American writers implicate themselves with episodes in which (generally younger) characters, upon encountering other characters who remind them of their non-white state and status, project their internalization of racist ideas and their own self-hate by harassing and terrorizing their “racial shadows.” Examples of that may include Hong Kingston’s story of torturing a silent Chinese American girl in *The Woman Warrior* (171–182); Ashley Sheun Dunn’s story of an “Americanized” soldier, Stuart, who fantasizes about killing various “un-Americanized” Chinese characters; and David Henry Hwang’s play, “FOB,” which deals with the malicious relationship between a native-born, Dale, and a Hong Kong-born Chinese American, Steve (see also Marlon K. Hom; and Sheng-mei Ma, 24–39). In addition, R. Lee (“Territorial,” 2–11; see also her “Claiming,” 147–152) suggests that this ambiguous relationship between resistance and reinscription is a theme of Hong Kingston’s *China Men*. According to R. Lee, Hong Kingston has her Chinese American males implicating themselves in their very acts of claiming America. In claiming first property rights as “early” cultivators, they risk participating in the injustice of denying native Americans their long history on the continent. In claiming contribution to industrialization, like the building of the trans-continental railroad, they commit violence against nature for monetary gains, and facilitate the economic and cultural hegemony that the United States exercises over Asia. In claiming patriotism during war times, they adopt and promote the ideology of might and domination. R. Lee suggests that Hong Kingston is highlighting the ever-present possibility that Chinese Americans may be working for their oppressor to their own destruction if they adopt rather than abhor the system that bases acceptance upon performance.⁵ In other words,

⁵ As Maxime Rodinson (5) writes:

Ideology always goes for the simplest solutions. It does not argue that an oppressed people is to be defended because it is oppressed and to the extent to which it is oppressed. On the contrary, the oppressed are sanctified and every aspect of their actions, their culture, their past, present and future behavior is presented as admirable. Direct or indirect narcissism takes over and the fact that the oppressed are oppressed becomes less important than the admirable way they are themselves. The slightest criticism is seen as criminal sacrilege. In particular, it becomes quite inconceivable that the oppressed might themselves be oppressing others. In an ideological conception, such an admission would imply that the object of admirable was flawed and hence . . . deserving

Chinese American narratives alert us to not only a colonial relationship, but also a complicit relationship that may exist between those in the center and on the margin.⁶

Chow (73-90), writing after the Tiananmen Massacre of June 1989, further points out the socio-political problems, and potential abuse, that come with the deference, unconditional trust, and thus absolute authority that Confucianism gives to so-called "strong men" of both character and knowledge.⁷ Mark's presentation of Jesus as a "strongest man" who can bind Satan, as one who has absolute authority, and as one whom we should follow in faith and trust, then, sounds disconcertingly close to the Confucian "politics of personality" (Chow, 81).

Subjects of Agency

With "From Necessity to Extravagance" as its subtitle, S. C. Wong's book is in fact a celebration of agency. For her, in spite of the pressures from within and without to succumb to the doctrine of "necessity," contemporary Chinese American writers are themselves living proof that Chinese Americans have both the choice and the ability to reject "lucrative," "respected," and thus traditionally "safe" and "preferred" careers in science, engineering, medicine or business. Drawing examples from Hwang's "The Dance and the Railroad," and Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and *Tripmaster Monkey*, S. C. Wong (186-211) suggests that Chinese American writers understand their literary creativity as both artistically satisfying for themselves as well as politically edifying for their communities. This is so not only because, in Hong Kingston's terms (*Woman Warrior*,

to past and present oppression (see also Fanon, *Black Skin*, 29; and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, 166-179).

R. Lee ("Claiming," 152-155) also argues that Hong Kingston demonstrates how to resist violence without repetitive violence or reinscribing domination by (1) substituting "voicing" for violence as a means of vengeance in the mythical tale of Fa Mu Lan (*Woman Warrior*, 19-53); and (2) denying at the same time that voicing is the only means of resistance in the narrator's encounter with the silent Chinese girl (*Woman Warrior*, 171-182).

⁶ According to E. San Juan, Jr., this is also the problem of Takaki's work, which ends by presenting Chinese and other Asian Americans as another successful immigrant story instead of questioning "the utilitarian, competitive ethos of a business society" (545).

⁷ For Chow, this focus on individuals involves another problem: it averts any critique against the overall "moralistic structure" of "governing-by-trust" (86, 90). In other words, they cannot see the forest for the trees.

53), “reporting” wrongs is “revenging” wrongs, but their presence as writers and artists also subverts the predominant stereotypical image among whites that Chinese Americans are industrious, intelligent, and serious-minded nerds born for science and technology. As S. C. Wong herself documents on the very first page of her book (5), Chinese American narratives have been thriving in the last couple of decades; in such a time, when Chinese Americans’ exercise of agency is met with a better receptivity, Mark’s grim view on human agency becomes rather inappropriate if not pathetic.

Subjects of Gender

Patriarchal constructions of gender are present in Chinese American narratives, especially at the hand of male writers. As Louis Chu, for example, protests how early discriminatory laws (especially immigration policy that limited the admission of Chinese women into the country) turned New York’s Chinatown into an unhealthy ethnic ghetto and Chinese men into obsessive gamblers and prostitution solicitors, he also represents women as mere objects of men.⁸ His only significant female character, Mei Oi, is originally arranged to marry Ben Loy by her father and Ben Loy’s father to absolve their own guilt for abandoning their wives and daughter in China. The plan, at least in the mind of Ben Loy’s father, is for his wife and daughter-in-law to give each other company and comfort in the old village so he can continue his life across the Pacific Ocean with some peace of mind. That peace of mind, however, soon turns restless, as he worries that Ben Loy, being separated from his wife, will adopt his father’s whoring lifestyle. Moreover, the old man begins to entertain the excitement that grandchildren can bring him in the present, as well as the security that grandchildren can provide him in the future. Like a pawn in the old men’s hands, Mei Oi, with the softening of immigration policy, is transported to the United States. A dreamy eighteen-year-old who is not equipped to deal with life, especially when her husband is so riddled by guilt over his whoring past that he is unable to give her enough affection and support in her new country, Mei Oi is seduced by an older man, and becomes pregnant

⁸ Ruth Y. Hsiao has recently argued that besides racism, Chu’s narrative is also an attack on the patriarchal relationships between parents and children. If so, then Chu’s reinscription of patriarchy against women within the same novel becomes even more ironic.

with Ah Song's child. In other words, Mei Oi, like the prostitutes that Chu constantly refers to, is depicted as an object of male sexual desire; besides Ah Song, Chu also has another seducer named Chin Yuen waiting for Mei Oi. Women's status as male property is also tellingly reflected by Chu's statement that marriage "gave him [Ben Loy] a sense of possession, of owning. . . . It gave him a feeling of dignity" (12). As "owner," Ben Loy forbids Mei Oi from getting a job, because "when a group of women get together . . . there's bound to be trouble" (80). Little does he realize that the trouble that he is most afraid of, an adulterous wife (or more accurately, a loss of property?) can happen even when Mei Oi is kept home. Mei Oi's adultery results in the tragic breakups of some long-standing relationships: Ah Song is put on a five-year exile, Ben Loy and Mei Oi move to San Francisco, and both their fathers have to leave New York. In other words, life in Chinatown is corrupted by both the absence and the presence of women within Chu's narrative.

When it comes to women, Chin becomes as oppressive and as reactionary as the institutionalized racism that he denounces. In his narratives, women are brainless and clueless. One of his favorite depictions is an unequal relationship between a male protagonist who tries to forge a Chinese American identity and a female sidekick who fails to follow and learn, like Johnny and Sharon in "Food for All His Dead," Freddy and Lena in "Yes Young Daddy," and Tam and Lee in "Chickencoop Chinaman." Blind to his own sexist views in his fight against both explicit and implicit racist ideology, he repeatedly charges white America for stripping Chinese Americans of "manhood," which he equates with daring, aggression, courage, originality, and creativity (Chin, J. Chan, L. Inada, and S. H. Wong, xxx; and Chin and J. Chan, 68). Linking "masculinity" with aggression, Chin—writing under the alias, Jeffery Leong—uses the abusive metaphor that Chinese Americans may reclaim their "manhood" by committing an act of gang-rape (131–133). Likewise, his association of "masculinity" with originality and creativity means that "literary creativity is the proper domain of men" (E. Kim, 180). This explains his outrage over the publication of female Chinese American writers (Chin, J. Chan, L. Inada, and S. H. Wong, xxx), as well as his jealous parody of Hong Kingston's critically acclaimed *The Woman Warrior* ("Afterword").⁹ What Chow writes about some Chinese intellectuals

⁹ In his parody, Chin renames *The Woman Warrior* the "Unmanly Warrior," and Hong Kingston "Smith Mei-jing," which can be translated literally as "Smith

is certainly true of Chin: "They are minors and women when faced with 'foreigners'; they are fathers when faced with 'insiders,' especially women" (Chow, 110).

A new wave of female Chinese American writers have brought to us different constructions of gender.¹⁰ E. Kim (256) gives us two examples (Genny Lim's "On Weaning in America"; and Nellie Wong's "From a Heart of Rice Straw") in which Chinese American daughters come to both realize and appreciate the courage and strength of their mothers. All three of Tan's novels have women as her central characters; and her second (*Kitchen God's Wife*) is arguably her most open celebration of feminist liberation through the life of its female protagonist.

In Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator, empowered (and admittedly, also enslaved) by the magic of the family matriarch's "talk-story," fantasizes herself as the heroine, Fa Mu Lan, who will break out of her prescribed gender role, revenge her village of their oppressors, and lead the villagers to tear down the "ancestral tablets" (45), which S. C. Wong insightfully identifies as "symbols of tradition and patriarchal authority" (206). Even in her second text that seemingly focuses on the racist humiliation suffered by "China men," Hong Kingston begins her entire narrative with a story of Tang Ao (*China Men*, 3-5). This story is basically an adoption of the popular complaint among Chinese American men like Chin that they have been "emasculated" or "effeminated" by a racist society. Hong Kingston, however, fills the story with many details of what a Chinese woman actually goes through in China's patriarchal culture, like the threat of having her lips sown together, the painful practice of ear-piercing and foot-binding, the imposed dietary regulations, the unpleasant chores of washing bloody bandages and bloody underwear, the elimination of facial hair and the application of makeup so that they will be deemed "pretty," and the obligation to serve at meal times. She seems, therefore, intent on impressing on her male readers that their antiracist protest should be accompanied with an antisexist practice (Cheung, "The Woman Warrior"; and R. Lee, "Territorial," 3-4).

American-gold". The implication is, of course, that Hong Kingston is another (female) "traitor" who, like J. S. Wong and Virginia Chin-lan Lee before her, sells "cultural pornography" for money (see Chin, "Railroad," 3).

¹⁰ This new wave of female writers has also led to the rediscovery of earlier female Chinese American writers who have been buried by a racist as well as sexist history and publishing industry; see Ling, *Between Worlds*.

Recently, Donald Goellnicht (195 196, 199) has suggested that similar dynamics are at work in two other episodes within *China Men*. In a parody of the Fall of Hebrew scripture, Hong Kingston (*China Men*, 119–121) has a man losing a promise of immortality from a Taoist monk because upon being turned into a woman, (s)he comes to realize that obedience to the monk's patriarchal command to silence may bring injury to "her" child. In "The Father from China," Hong Kingston (*China Men*, 11–60) parallels Baba's entry into the new country with a traditional Chinese bride's marriage into a new family. Both experience a family change, a name change, and a restrictive perspective that brings about a sense of imprisonment, isolation, and fear (Baba is "smuggled" into the States in a sealed crate, and a Chinese bride's face is generally covered with a towel). Goellnicht (201–203) further suggests that Hong Kingston shows how Chinese American men have difficulty associating antiracism with antisexism, because Baba continues to speak and act against his wife and daughters despite his own run in with racial oppression (Hong Kingston, *China Men*, 12–14, 253).

Switching Metaphors: Swiss Cheese or Unraveling Tapestries?

Reading Chinese American narratives alongside Mark's Gospel shows that while politically and culturally colonized groups may construct different pictures of authority, agency, and gender at different times in history, they also seem to face a constant danger that is indifferent to time and history: the danger of duplicating their colonizer's ideology, and becoming oppressors of others.¹¹ This observation is in line with current development within colonial/postcolonial studies, which have moved beyond the old politics of blame to study how nationalism often becomes an antonym of liberation, and decolo-

¹¹ It is even more sobering when one remembers how often this kind of duplication actually happened in the history of the so-called "Judeo-Christian" tradition. Not long before Mark's Gospel, there were the Maccabees, whose nationalist independence movement turned into tyrannical oppression (Elias Bickermann); not too long after Mark's Gospel, Christianity was transformed from a marginal religion into the imperial (and imperialistic) religion of the Roman Empire (Olster, 30–50). In the case of Chinese Americans, one only has to point to the sweet yet bitter feeling that we felt as we watched Hong Kong officially ending its status as a British colony to re-unite with a Chinese government that has been notorious for its oppression of its own people as well as its colonization of others (like, the people of Tibet).

nization a synonym of neocolonialism.¹² One may wonder, however, if this emphasis on the duplicitous relationship between colonizers and colonized results in a loss of innocence as well as a loss of hope. In other words, if colonized people are, to borrow Morson's phrase, "implicating as well as implicated" ("Heresiarch," 411), are we not, for all practical purposes, returning to Foucault's pervasive power or Stephen Greenblatt's understanding (see, for example, his *Renaissance*; and "Invisible Bullets") that any attempt to subvert will inevitably be "entrapped" or "contained" within the structure of power? To put it yet another way, does the complicity of the colonized mean that one must subscribe to the so-called "swiss cheese theory" of power, which asserts that resistance is like crawling through holes that are left open by the ruling power; that after all is said and done, one is not capable of breaking power's stronghold?

I will point out, however, that the very critics whom I have credited for alerting us to the ambiguous relationship between resistance and reinscription are also adamant about the need for, and the possibility of, human resistance. Spivak, for example, insists, right after another reference to how independence may become imperialistic, that one of her main arguments in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* is that "there is always a space . . . of the displacement of the colonization-decolonization reversal" ("Woman," 77-78). Likewise, Said prefates his *Culture and Imperialism* with the comment that despite his criticism of colonized people (for duplicating oppressive regimes), he is committed to show the force of resistance, and that "there have always been alternatives to Idi Amin and Saddam Hussein" (xxiv).

¹² Harlow (154-197), for example, talks about how this has been the experience of Nigeria, Algeria, Kenya, Ghana, Egypt, and "third world" feminism. Several theorists are particularly associated with this emphasis within contemporary colonial/postcolonial studies, including, though not exhaustively, Bhabha (for example, "Signs"; "Postcolonial Authority"; and "Of Mimicry and Man"), from whom I borrow the term "colonial mimicry"; Spivak (for example, "Explanation," 381-382; and *Post-Colonial Critic*, 44-45, 54, 135), who, as I mentioned in Chapter I, politicizes deconstruction by using it as a way to alert a critic to his or her own complicity in the very system which he or she critiques; Said, whose later works have moved beyond the rigid "us-vs.-them" binarism of his *Orientalism* to accentuate the entangled relationships between "friends" and "foes" (for example, *Culture*, 9, 12, 18-19, 54, 61, 168, 241-242, 273, 282), and talk about a postcolonial intellectual's role to attest to "an experience of colonialism that continues into the present" ("Intellectuals," 54); and Trinh (for example, *Framer*, 56; *Moon*, 8, 88, 91-95, 100, 158-159; and *Woman*, 80), whose writings remind us that the idea that "domination is [often] propagated by the dominated" (Theodor W. Adorno, 121) has actually been theorized by an earlier generation of critics (like Lorde, "Age," 287; Lorde, "Master's Tools," 99; and Wole Soyinka, 127).

A statement that Alexis de Tocqueville wrote a century ago may aptly express the sentiments of these critics as well as my own: "I am certainly not the one to say that such inclinations [to reproduce colonial ideology] are invincible, for my chief aim in writing this book is to combat them" (647).

The danger of "colonial mimicry" reminds me not that power is invincible, but rather that power relations are unstable (Belsey, *Subject*, 98–99; Sinfield, *Faultlines*, 173–174, 299). Gagnier cites Jean Franco's exposition of the dependency theory to describe the relationship between the dominant and the dissident "as 'intertextuality' of a very special kind" (148). In other words, the dominant and the dissident are not binary opposites, and their relationship is not one in which the dissident is entirely engulfed by the dominant; instead, dominant and dissident elements are intricately interrelated parts of our social fabric. Cultures and ideologies, then, are more processes of *bricolage* than smooth pieces of swiss cheese with manageable airholes. Dominant and dissident elements exist side by side, and they are susceptible to each other's influence.¹³

Before one becomes pessimistic about the possibility of resistance and change, one must also remember that resistance and change often happen in stages. Reversing a hierarchy may be a crucial first stage in the process of (re)structuring a hierarchy-free world (for example, Parry, 30–31). Similarly, Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan talks about a short-term, "semantic" strategy when it is necessary for minority or oppressed people to engage in identity politics in a rather rigid, essentialist way, and a "preposterous" (or long-term), "syntactic" strategy when the very idea of "identity" can be deconstructed (see also Said, *Culture*, xxiv–xxv; Spivak, "Literary Representation," 249–250).

Understanding the evolutionary nature of change does not mean, though, that one should excuse or overlook any lingering oppressive

¹³ As I explained in Chapter II, "inter(con)textuality" involves a dynamic interaction that goes back and forth rather than a one-directional influence. For instance, both Lentricchia (105–106) and Pease ("Toward a Sociology," 122–123) have given examples to show that while subordinate cultures may be exploited, elements of dominant cultures may also be manipulated for the purpose of liberation. And as we will see, Bakhtin's understanding of social hegemony and counter-hegemony as an on-going struggle between monoglot and heteroglossia without decisive victory is very similar to the position of many contemporary critics and theorists (see Pechey, 70). Note also that my use of the term "dissident" is actually suggested by Sinfield (*Faultlines*, 45, 49), who, sharing Bakhtin's sentiment for an on-going resistance rather than an instantaneous transformation, discards the term "subversive" because it indicates fulfillment ("subverted" as something finished and done with).

elements within the initial stages, or that one should become complacent and stop prematurely in his or her resistance efforts. What it does mean is that change and resistance are long struggles that require constant critiques and vigilance; and that not having arrived at utopia is not the same as not having achieved or not being able to achieve any progress toward liberation. In fact, the association between resistance and reinscription has caused many postcolonial and cultural critics to give up on utopia or any apocalyptic type of instantaneous revolution. They do not, however, give up their commitment to engage in socio-political struggles for liberation. Bhabha ("Postcolonial Authority," 56-57, 66), talking about the peril of pre-determining the sources of oppression, the strategies of contest as well as the picture of perfection, suggests that criticism be done from perspectives of the "edge" rather than the "end." Said ("Reflections," 364-366), pointing to the irony that Palestinians are exiled by the "proverbial people of exile, the Jews" ("Reflections," 360) and the vulnerability of exiled people to blind loyalties that turn xenophobic or tragic isolations that breed cynicism, quotes Adorno and Hugo of St. Victor (a monk from the twelfth century C.E.) to assert the importance of an engagement that is, at the same time, willing to unsettle all underlying assumptions.¹⁴ Emphasizing what she calls "displacement," Trinh in like manner stresses "the continuous renewal of a critical work that looks carefully and intensively at the very system of values to which one refers in fabricating the tools of resistance" ("Cotton," 331). She further clarifies that this continuous rejection of closures should not be understood negatively as

¹⁴ In *Culture and Imperialism* (27-28, 335-336), Said repeats this theme of incessant inquiry with numerous examples of neocolonialism, as well as a reference to Rushdie's ("Outside the Whale") indifference to historical destiny but insistence on historical involvement. In light of Said's reference to Adorno in "Reflections on Exile" (365) and insistence on resistance in *Culture and Imperialism* (xxiv), one may question if Varadharajan is guilty of making a straw figure out of Said to pit against Adorno. The same can be said concerning Varadharajan's treatment of Spivak, whose work, which Spivak sometimes characterizes as "persistent critique" or "a practical politics of open end" (the meanings of which are becoming self-explanatory, I hope, within the context of the present discussion), can hardly be reduced to an emphasis of powerlessness on the part of colonized groups, especially in light of Spivak's repeated disclaimer that deconstruction should not be equated with a political program (for example, "Feminism," 121, 130, 135-163). While Parry has also made a similar criticism of Spivak earlier, Parry was responding to one particular article Spivak has written ("Can the Subaltern Speak?"); unlike Parry, Varadharajan's criticism is, in view of the bibliography provided, supposedly based on quite a comprehensive reading of Spivak's writings.

disengagement nor surrender (the so-called “anything-goes” mentality), but rather positively as a willingness to have every premise critically examined (an “anything-may-go” attitude; *Framer*, 259). S. Hall, in a recent attempt to reflect on the past and future of cultural studies, offers “the metaphor of struggle, of wrestling with the angels” to describe what he calls “the infinite open-endedness of critical work” (280, 289–290). In addition, it is important to note, as McRobbie does (“Post-Marxism,” 726), that S. Hall’s intellectual modesty is coupled with an insistence on political involvement. Lentricchia (10, 28–29, 35–36, 77–79, 116, 139–143) also stresses that history is not teleologically assured, that radical rupture is impossible, and that our well-intentioned actions may turn out to be harmful; but he also continues to argue for activism and the possibility of progressive change rather than assuming a fatalistic and powerless position. Referring to Burke as his theoretical inspiration, Lentricchia goes on to affirm that even if we cannot predict the results of our actions, we cannot deny what we do know as our political responsibility, and that there is enough ground for action and intervention.¹⁵

I believe Rich expresses this sentiment well when she writes, “I come here with notes but without absolute conclusion. This is not a sign of loss of faith or hope. These notes are the marks of a struggle to keep moving” (“Notes,” 211). Emphasizing our roles as victims, agents, and accomplices, as well as understanding resistance and change as long processes of open-ended struggles can actually be enabling rather than disabling. It encourages humility without endorsing a value-free relativism, although judgments will be made in terms of “more or less” instead of “either-or” (see Brantlinger, *Crusoe’s Footprints*, 106). It emphasizes the need to keep one’s mind inquisitive and sharp by pushing one to become self-aware and self-critical. Finally, it may actually reinforce our will to challenge neocolonialism in all of its forms and disguises by confronting us with neocolonialism’s subtle and coopting power. Of course, as Trinh

¹⁵ To relate this discussion to Mark’s apocalyptic outlook, let me point out that Schweid’s article (69) on Jewish messianic movements contains, as a response to secular Zionism, a discussion of Martin Buber’s “corrective messianism.” In contrast to Mark’s fatalistic acquiescence to suffer and die and a deterministic view that history will end with an imminent and assured victory from God, Buber’s “corrective messianism” is basically a commitment to public action without the confidence that utopia will ever be realized (see also Mendel, 309–322). It is also noteworthy that Segovia (“Theological Education”) has recently developed, on the basis of his and his family’s experience, a theme of utopia-less struggle for Hispanic/Latino theology.

rightly observes, the vulnerability or uncertainty involved “never fails either to baffle or to awaken profound intolerance and anxieties” (“Cotton,” 329).¹⁶ Yet, I agree with Keller that “the ultimate intellectual freedom may lie in accepting ambivalence, exploring multiple roles, and allowing internal debate” (241). What we need today is not Mark’s apocalyptic promise of quick change and vision of victory (which, as I have argued, is every bit as authoritarian, exclusionary, and coercive as a colonial regime), but in the words of Fraser, a right mix of “pessimism of the intellect,” “optimism of the will,” and “social hope” (“Solidarity,” 59).

Instead of the “swiss cheese” metaphor that confines oppositions within pre-given openings and condemns resistance as futile, I would like to propose another metaphor for what R. Williams calls “the long revolution.” To describe the kind of patient, persistent, productive but simultaneously unpredictable work of resistance, I would submit a metaphor that echoes my underlying theory of “inter(con)textuality,” that of unraveling a tapestry. To unravel a tapestry, one does have a clear goal that something complicated (and probably ugly and hideous as well) needs to be undone, but there is no urgency that one has to have already in mind a picture of what a possible replacement will look like. In other words, this metaphor has the advantage of implying no call for, nor a claim of, a master plan. As a matter of fact, to untangle the numerous strands of textile that make up a tapestry, one must make room for accidents and surprises. While one may be baffled by the length of a certain color thread, and be frustrated by the way it is tangled up with numerous other threads, one can be sure that the tapestry is disintegrating (if ever so slightly) with every pulling of every string. As this metaphor makes room for contingencies beyond human control, it does not preclude human agency. Our work of resistance may at times be perplexing and discouraging, but it is not futile.

Concerning our work as oppositional critics in light of our roles as both agents of change and accomplices of the status quo, I will close by reiterating an emphasis that (I hope) should have come across at different points in this project. The painful realization that it is a life-long task to liberate ourselves from “that piece of the

¹⁶ An example of that is Fish. As I have already pointed out in Chapter I, Fish’s conservative response to oppositional criticism has much to do with his demand that our endeavors *must* bring about a complete and lasting change in society (see also Sinfield, *Faultlines*, 288–289).

oppressor which is planted deep within each of us" (Lorde, "Age," 287) means not only the rejection of the problematic "us-vs.-them" binarism, but also the embrace of alliance politics. Alliance politics, in turn, means at least a couple of things for me. First, it means that I should avoid engaging in single-issue politics in my work; for it is precisely in fighting on more than one front that I may challenge oppression's age-old "divide-and-conquer" strategy as well as its power to coopt. Chow (96–97), for example, reminds us that a year after the Tiananmen Square massacre, the Chinese government sought to blur or erase the memory of their own oppressive ways by highlighting the long history of oppression that Chinese had suffered under "western imperialists." Oppression, however, comes from many sources. Various struggles must find an "equivalential articulation" (Laclau and Mouffe, 182) that does not surrender the particularity of any specific struggle, but eventually creates room for us to identify with a given struggle without opposing other struggles for liberation. Second, it means an honest admission that I need help from other critics who share a commitment to socio-political liberation. Since I am inevitably limited by my own specific perspectives, I must become responsible by being willing to examine and disclose the assumptions and interests underlying my work; but try as I may, there is bound to be some blind spots that I simply cannot see—until someone points them out to me.¹⁷ As Spivak puts it so well, "genuine criticism are in fact a gift" (*Post-Colonial Critic*, 37).¹⁸

Gospels, Socio-Political Reading, and Cultural Politics

As the Gospels joins other canonized literary texts in becoming contesting sites of cultural politics, it is often assumed that the function

¹⁷ Tolbert has also expressed a similar sentiment in terms of one's pain and privilege. She writes, "one tends to be most conscious of the pain of one's own particular circumstances, it is often possible to ignore in one's life and in one's rhetoric those areas where one's privileges stand on the oppression of others" ("Afterwords: Politics and Poetics," 316).

¹⁸ I agree with hooks that reading someone's text critically and analytically (in my case, that "text" includes both the Bible and the interpretations of other scholars) is generally not a reflection of hostility, but one of interest and respect (see Michele Wallace, 666). Being aware of the limits of knowing is how Spivak (*Post-Colonial Critic*, 25; see also 11, 27, 157) understands the term "critical." "Critical" studies of the Bible, then, are studies that not only examine where the Bible has its limits, but studies that admit their own limits as well.

of a critic of the Gospels is to settle the question of whether the Gospels are oppressive or liberating texts. Sinfield (*Faultlines*, 104) is correct, however, in his discussion of a similar dilemma facing ideological critics who work with Shakespearean texts, that such an assumption reflects a basic misunderstanding of the texts in question, and by extension, an adequate program for critics. I hope my analysis of Mark has shown that the Gospel cannot be reduced to either side of such a neat binarism, but that its fabric—to use David Miller's (57) “inter(con)textual” metaphor—can be a meaningful tapestry as well as an imprisoning trap.¹⁹ Back in Chapter I, I mentioned that G. Lee makes an incriminating connection between oppression and the Bible; what I have failed to say is that G. Lee has an episode within the same novel (19) in which the protagonist's grandparents become worried over their child's (the protagonist's birth-mother) newly developed interest in the Bible, because they have heard about Jesus' challenge of traditional authority as well as Jesus' death. Likewise, Tolbert's critique of the Bible (“Reconstituting the World”) as legitimating different forms of social evil is coupled with an affirmation that the Bible has inspired numerous acts of love and justice, ranging from Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, to Albert Schweitzer. What this shows is that the cognitive paradigm that divides literary texts into either “oppressive” or “liberating” camps is not a helpful one for the interpretation of the Gospels.

According to some theorists (for example, Sinfield, *Faultlines*, 48, 116, 126; and R. Williams, *Marxism*, 121–127), the co-existence of dominant and dissident voices within a literary text means that whether a text turns out to promote the status quo or speak out for progressive change is dependent on the actual reception, or the relative strengths of the two camps at a specific juncture of history. Aside from theological commitment, this may be a major reason why many critics continue to argue that their oppositional politics

¹⁹ Note that Bakhtin sees even his favorite genre, the novel, as both a “liberating hero” and a “debunking trickster” (Holquist, *Dialogism*, 72). According to Lentricchia (105–106), literary texts can never be purely oppressive or liberating because—going back to the interdependent relationship between binary terms—both elements must be present for communication to take place. Or, as Sinfield (*Faultlines*, 48) explains it, in order to suppress or challenge a certain perspective in a literary text, one must first present it, or mis-present it; in other words, the opposing element has to be there for the literary phase of the political process to function. See also Macherey for a more detailed theorization of this process.

is based on the Gospels, and that the Gospels are squarely on the side of the oppressed.²⁰ I have, however, a couple of problems with such an approach. First, there is the problem of oversimplifying a biblical text like Mark when one refrains from examining its dark and unholy side. We cannot take the easy way out by implying that whatever problems the Gospels may have been associated with were all results of “mis-interpretation.” Instead, I agree with Chow (21) that we need to learn from the way Foucault handles the problem of the Gulag; that is, being willing to confront a predicament as an understandable evolution of its founding texts or theories rather than condemning it as an unacceptable error.²¹ But more importantly, such an approach only reinforces the Gospels as cultural authorities; and in light of the current political climate, when fundamentalism and right-wing conservatism are attempting a fierce comeback, this strategy seems even less advisable.²²

Instead of getting stuck in this old “Gospels-as-oppressors-or-liberators” debate, I suggest that we use our socio-political reading of a Gospel to help investigate present power relations in a different manner. Rather than accusation or apologetics, can we not use a Gospel as an “avenue” through which we may encounter difference and further our exploration; or, as I mentioned before, to share each

²⁰ A good example of that is Brueggemann, although his main focus is not on the Gospels. His so-called “postmodern negotiation” with the Bible is basically an affirmation that “the Bible does indeed radically reconstruc and recontextualize reality” for liberation (26). Belo, Myers, Waetjen (*Reordering of Power*), and Hamerton-Kelly primarily do the same thing with Mark.

²¹ For Foucault, addressing the problem of Gulag means:

[not] question[ing] the Gulag on the basis of the texts of Marx or Lenin or to ask oneself how, through what error, deviation, misunderstanding or distortion of speculation or practice, their theory could have been betrayed to such a degree. On the contrary, it means questioning all these theoretical texts, however old, from the standpoint of the reality of the Gulag. Rather than searching in those texts for a condemnation in advance of the Gulag, it is a matter of asking what in those texts could have made the Gulag possible, what might even now continue to justify it, and what makes it [*sic.*] intolerable truth still acceptable today. The Gulag question must be posed not in terms of error (reduction of the problem to one of theory), but in terms of reality (*Power/Knowledge*, 135).

²² Likewise, Itumeleng J. Mosala points to the oppressive side of the Bible, and questions the prudence of claiming the Bible as “the Word of God,” and as the basis of one’s anti-apartheid efforts. Despite their emphasis on reception and a type of rhetorical tug-of-war, both Sinfield (*Faultlines*, 23–24) and R. Williams (*Culture*, 225) remain suspicious of any strategy that builds up rather than challenges traditional authority.

other's (a Gospel's and ours) vulnerability?²³ For example, if one takes the Gospels as (anti-)colonial literature, as I do, one will certainly look at the relationships between colonizer and colonized depicted within the texts, but can one not explore at the same time the relationships between colonized and colonized? I have argued, after all, that Mark's own anti-colonial narrative reinscribes colonial and patriarchal ideology. To put it another way, can we probe traces of dominant ideology within the Gospels' anti-colonial rhetoric, and in the process understand and uncover residues of oppression within our own efforts for liberation? As Fleischacker (110-114) argues, reading the so-called "authoritative texts" of one's tradition can be beneficial in at least two ways: (1) it may help us understand the origin or the reasons for our present power relations; and (2) it may serve as a form of creative distanciation from which we may refresh, reevaluate, and renew our thoughts on contemporary situations.²⁴

This kind of "persistent critique," as Spivak explains it so well ("Reading *The Satanic Verses*," 234-235), should no longer be a mere exposure of positives and negatives (a relativism that may only help promote fundamentalism by default), and it is not even the preservation of positives and the elimination of negatives. Instead, it is a negation of positives, a constant challenge against closure, something that may be comparable to Paul Tillich's insistence on a myth's self-negation.²⁵ Or, going back to Spivak's application of Derrida's terms, it will not be enough to say that the Gospels contain some texts that are "poison," and others that are "medicine"; what we should try to show is how "medicine" and "poison" are often one and the same

²³ According to Morson ("Who Speaks for Bakhtin," 236), this approach to literary texts is part of the legacy of Bakhtin's work. To be more specific, I relate my suggestion to what Bakhtin says about the learning of literary texts (*Dialogic Imagination*, 259-422). He says that one may be asked to "recite" or "retell"; while "reciting" is authoritarian and leads to accusation and/or apologetics, "retelling" gets around the crediting/discrediting process because it is democratic and dialogic. Note that Bakhtin also implies in his discussion that the command to "recite" actually betrays the command-er's realization that the text in question is already a relic, dead, and a thing of the past.

²⁴ I must clarify that I am wary of certain aspects of Fleischacker's overall argument concerning our reading of "authoritative texts," like his emphasis on so-called "authoritative interpreters" (112), his idea that our dialogues with these "authoritative texts" may actually replace our dialogues with our contemporaries, and his generally positive and affirmative stance toward tradition.

²⁵ Notice that Tillich does not demand an end of all myths, nor does Spivak deny the need for grounding. What both of them insist, is a continuous problematization of that which we desperately need and want.

thing. Or, to adapt a popular aphorism, I want to investigate the Gospels to show how “one person’s trash is that same person’s treasure.” I want to bring to our consciousness that the Gospels, as “light,” is one that can illuminate as well as blind. For me, faith’s greatest enemy is not (as Mark claims) “fear,” but “blindness,” or in Frye’s words, “mental insensitivity that does not see what all the fuss is all about” (230). Only a continual commitment to examine and eliminate blindness (the Gospels’ and our own) will help sustain the ongoing struggle for socio-political liberation for all.

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This volume moves literary criticism of the Gospels further into the socio-political struggle for liberation – particularly, into the realm of colonial/postcolonial discourse. Taking seriously the thought that Mark's Gospel was written under Roman colonization, and using 'inter(con)textuality' as an underlying theory, it examines the relation between Mark's story of Jesus and colonial politics, especially Mark's emphasis on the parousia and his constructions of colonial subjects. It argues that Mark's apocalyptic simultaneously resists and reinscribes colonial ideology in terms of three subject-positions and subject-matters: authority, agency, and gender. Juxtaposing apocalyptic and politics, dissidence and duplication as well as Chinese American narratives and the Markan text, this volume seeks to rethink our struggle for social change and the relationship between cultural politics and Gospel studies.

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ISSN 0928-0731

ISBN 90-04-11360-6



9 789004 113602